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An Analysis of Matthew Fox's Mystical Immanence

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the
University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

Joan Davies Evans

December 2010

An Analysis of Matthew Fox's Mystical Immanence

Abstract

The key objective of this research is to explore Matthew Fox's mystical immanence, as developed in his panentheistic Creation-centred theology. Focussing on the key theme in his thought, the relationship between prayer and social justice, this thesis provides what is essentially an auteur critique. That is to say, his theology is excavated by means of biographical analysis, exploring his principal formative influences.

In Chapter One the thesis seeks to identify and chronicle his spiritual odyssey, from his home environment via his seminary training within the Dominican Order to his acceptance into the Episcopal priesthood in 1994. Chapter Two focuses on the main influences on Fox's thought, particularly: Marie-Dominique Chenu, who transformed Catholic thought in the twentieth century; Jewish spirituality, as developed by Martin Buber, Abraham Heschel, and Otto Rank; and Robert Bly, the American poet, author, activist and leader of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement.

Turning specifically to the principal developments in his theology, the third chapter, analyses Fox's mysticism. His consistent use of the term 'Creation' is an indication of the cosmic orientation of this thinking, while his 'creation spirituality' is undergirded by his embrace of Thomas Aquinas, the Rhineland mystics and his rejection of Augustine. This chapter also evaluates the diverse scholarly critiques which have attempted to classify his work as New Age, pantheist, and monist. The fourth chapter turns to his complex understanding of the historical Jesus and his quest for the 'Cosmic Christ' in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the Church Fathers. The thesis concludes with an examination of, firstly, Fox's understanding of 'Wisdom', focussing on the 'sophiological problem' within the Russian religious consciousness and, secondly, his interpretation of liberation theology and social justice, as developed in his theology of work, Gaia, and eco-feminism.

This work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning

Signed

This Thesis Contains words

Abbreviations and Illustrations

Abbreviations

ICCS Institute for Culture and Creation Spirituality

UCS University of Creation Spirituality

URI United Religions Initiative

Illustrations

Fig. 1 Table of World-affirming Pantheisms 125

Fig. 2 Table of Pantheism and Monism 126

Fig. 3 Table of Eckhart and Fox 139

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Contents

Introduction	10
1. Matthew Fox's Spiritual Journey and the Development of His Mystical Immanence	11
2. Nature of the Study	13
2. Literature Review	14
4. Thesis Outline	17
Chapter 1: The Life and Times of Matthew Fox	20
1. Introduction	20
2. Family Life in the Mystical State of Wisconsin	22
(a) The Formative Years	22
(b) The Years in High School	24
3. A Rite of Passage—Dominican Training 1958–1967	25
(a) A Quasi-Dominican Life at Loras College	25
(b) Novitiate Training at Minnesota and the Emergence of Brother Matthew	26
(c) Dominican Studies at Chicago	28
(d) Theological Studies at Dubuque	29
(e) Spirituality and Père Chenu at the Institute Catholique (1967–1970)	33
(f) A Confrontation with Cardinal Ratzinger	35
4. Pastoral Letter to Cardinal Ratzinger in 1988	36
5. From Roman Catholicism to the Episcopalian Church	39
6. An Overview of Fox's Work	39
7. Conclusion	48
Chapter 2: The External Influences on Matthew Fox's Creation Spirituality	49

1. Introduction	49
2. The French Revolution and the Catholic Church	49
(a) Liberty, Equality and Fraternity	50
(b) Ressourcement, Retrieval and Renewal	53
3. The Significance of Chenu's Thought in Relation to Matthew Fox	55
(a) The Setting for Chenu's Theology	56
(b) Chenu and Fox's <i>Nouvelle Théologie</i>	57
(c) Chenu and Fox in Relation to Aquinas, Augustinian Dualism and Contemplation	63
(d) Chenu and Fox's Christology	72
4. The Influence of Judaism and Rabbinic Thinking on Matthew Fox	80
(a) Martin Buber and Abraham Joshua Heschel's Discourse with Modern Man	80
(b) Otto Rank: A Prophet for Our Time	88
(c) <i>Tikkun</i> : A Jewish Critique of Politics, Culture and Society	90
5. Robert Bly and Iron John: An Insight into Fox's Reflection in the Garden	92
(a) Fairy Tales: Metaphors for the Inner Life	93
(b) Robert Bly and the Tale of Iron John	94
(c) A Critique of <i>Iron John</i>	97
(d) <i>Iron John</i> in relation to Chenu and Fox	98
(e) The Elusive Garden and a Road Well Travelled	100
(f) Fox and Bly: The Sacred Masculine	103
(g) Robert Bly and the Men's Movement	103
(h) A Critique of the Men's Movement	105
(i) Fox and the Hidden Spirituality of Men	107
6. Conclusion: The Basic Premises of Fox's Theology	108
Chapter 3: In Search of Mysticism	111
1. Introduction	111
2. Augustine Abandoned	112
3. A Scholarly Analysis of Matthew Fox's Spirituality	116
(a) On the Cusp of the New Age	116

(b) A Survey of the Catholic Response to Fox's Theology	118
(c) A Survey of the Protestant Response to Fox's Thought	121
(d) The Pagan Adoption of Fox	123
(e) Robert Brow and Vedantic Monism	124
(f) Critiques of Fox's Panentheism	129
4. The Speculative Mysticism of the Rhineland Mystics	130
(a) Matthew Fox's Interpretation of Meister Eckhart	131
(b) Meister Eckhart in <i>Passion for Creation</i>	135
(c) Fox's Manipulation of Eckhart's Text	138
(d) A Critique of Matthew Fox's Analysis of Meister Eckhart	140
(e) Hildegard of Bingen—Sibyl of the Rhine (1098–1179)	145
(f) Fox's Interpretation of Hildegard of Bingen	145
(g) Hildegard of Bingen and a Critique of Fox's Analysis of Hildegard of Bingen	152
5. The Mystical Paths of Creation Spirituality	162
(a) The Four Paths	162
6. Fox's Understanding of God and Creation	165
(a) <i>Dabhar</i> : The Creative Energy of God the Verb	169
7. Contemplating the Mystical Dimensions in Fox's Spirituality	171
(a) Fox, the Romantic Mystic	172
8. Conclusion	175
Chapter 4: From the Historical Jesus to the Cosmic Christ	179
1. Introduction	179
2. The Cyclical Pattern That Connects	180
3. The Historical Jesus: The Word or a Nature Mystic	183
(a) In the Beginning: The Word	184
(b) Jesus: An Original Blessing?	188
(c) Fox and the Quest for the Historical Jesus	192
4. The Quest for the Cosmic Christ	195
(a) The Cosmic Christ as Pre-existent and Apocalyptic Wisdom	197
(b) The Cosmic Christ in the New Testament	198
(c) The Cosmic Christ in the Church Fathers	201

5. The Metamorphosis of Wisdom to <i>Sophia</i>	202
(a) <i>Sophia</i> Wisdom in Fox's Spirituality	204
(b) <i>Sophia</i> Wisdom within Traditional Russian Orthodoxy Theology	204
(c) The Issue of Sophiology	205
6. Conclusion	210
Chapter 5: Continued Incarnation, Cosmic	
Incarnation and Global Justice	216
1. Introduction	216
2. The Imputation of Christianity as the Source of	
Our Environmental Crises	217
3. Chenu and Fox: A Theology of Work	220
4. The Church and Social Justice	226
5. The Sacred and Salvific Joy of Work	230
6. Ecological Death of Earth, Air, Fire and Water	234
(a) A Deep or Shallow Ecology	235
(b) An Option for the Poor and Marginalized	237
7. Fox's Vision for the Healing of Mother Earth	238
8. Interconnectedness: <i>Gaia</i> , the Goddess, and Mother Earth	240
9. Conclusion	246
Conclusion	253
Bibliography	263

Introduction

The thesis concerns Matthew Fox's mystical spirituality and, while there are many methods of practicing mystical prayer, Fox's contemplative spirituality leads to the awareness of ultimate reality within ourselves and right at our fingertips in the simplest expressions of human creativity. Following the general articulation of the Rhineland Mystics, Fox would insist that mysticism centrally concerns union with the divine in some sense. However, theologically, he is less concerned with the vertical than he is with the horizontal. Through an examination of his life, his intellectual development, and his formative influences, this thesis analyses his theology, and particularly its implications as a form of Christian panentheism.

Clearly, Fox's influence, as one of the principal architects of contemporary 'creation spirituality', has been significant. His impact, however, has not always been positive, with some judging him to provide an inadequate 'Christian' theology, based on a flawed interpretation of the traditions on which he draws (see Pacwa, 1992b; Keen, 1988; Meikle, 1985). Others, particularly conservative theologians, have been particularly damning of his work as a form of New Age-Christian syncretism. While recognizing the validity and value of such critiques—many of which are levelled by Protestant Evangelicals (see Keen, 1988; Meikle, 1985; Miller, 1990; Newport, 1998)—this thesis seeks to understand Fox's project from within his own theological milieu and on his own terms. Hence, in short, in order to understand this project, the thesis provides a three-pronged investigation: (a) an analysis of the development of Fox as a theologian, (b) an examination of the mystical spirituality he has sought to construct, and (c) an evaluation of the responses to his work. It might also be helpful to state what the thesis does not do. Unlike other examinations of his work, this thesis does not seek to defend a particular theological perspective, in that it is not a thesis which critiques him from a traditionalist Roman Catholic perspective, or an Evangelical perspective or, indeed, any other perspective. That is to say, broadly speaking, the thesis offers an examination of the influences that have shaped his thought as a modern thinker who has been nurtured

within the parameters of a Catholic education and training. To this end, key figures are identified as being significant for the development of this thought, most notably Marie-Dominique Chenu. Indeed, a large part of the original research in the thesis, and therefore its contribution to contemporary scholarship on Fox, is, I suggest, in the tradition of auteur criticism. It is an analysis of the development of Fox the author, the auteur. This is important, for as Eleanor Roosevelt put it, ‘one’s philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes. In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves... and the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility’ (1983: iv). Hence, the thesis begins with a careful examination of his life, from his formative years in Wisconsin, including his years of theological training, to his expulsion from the Catholic Church and his acceptance into the Anglican Communion. Following the choices Fox made and the commitments he espoused helps us to understand the man and the emerging shape of his theology more adequately than simply attending to his written theology. In many ways, the thesis is an exercise in the judicious reading between the lines.

1. Matthew Fox’s Spiritual Journey and the Development of His Mystical Immanence

To some extent the thesis can also be understood as a response to John Mabry’s short comment that

the naming of creation spirituality begins with a French Roman Catholic theologian M.D. Chenu, who died at the age of 86 in 1990. It was he who identified the thread of a creation-centered spiritual tradition running through the history of the church that was antithetical to the dominant theology that originated in and revolved around sin and redemption. Again and again this tradition was suppressed and denied by the Church at large, yet it has never been lost. Wherever one finds awe and wonder in the world, as in Francis of Assisi, wherever one finds artistry and the creative impulse, as in the cathedral builders of the middle ages, wherever one finds quietude enough to sink into

the depths of the soul, as in the desert fathers or the ‘Rheinland’ mystics, wherever one finds the courage to speak the truth about injustice regardless of the consequences, as in Jesus of Nazareth, there Chenu found the thin but long thread of the creation-centered spiritual tradition. But it was Chenu’s student, American priest and scholar Matthew Fox, who took up the torch and brought it to the world. Shunning the academic protocol of interminable and unreadable theological treatises, Fox wrote for the masses. (1995)

Previous commentators do little more than mention the fact that Marie-Dominique Chenu was Fox’s teacher. I have shown in the pages that follow that this relationship is far more significant than has previously been realized and Chenu’s thought was far more pervasive and pivotal than had previously been acknowledged. Once this is established and lines of continuity identified, Fox’s work opens up, so to speak.

As indicated above and in the title of the thesis, fundamental to Fox’s thought is an attempt to articulate the wisdom of the mystics in the modern age. Central to this project is the belief that the restoration of authentic mysticism does not begin with an individual seeker or religion. On the contrary, it begins with cosmology and creation as an ‘original blessing’ imbued with awe, wonder, pleasure and a sense of justice. Mysticism, Fox argues, is the ‘direct experience of divinity. It could be found within ourselves, our communities, our earth and the universe itself. Mystics seek to enter, firsthand, the awesome mystery of the universe and our existence within it’ (2005a: n.p.). In a letter to Cardinal Ratzinger and writing in his own defence, after his banishment, he defined his own and the core values at the Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality, which he founded, as follows:

ICCS is rekindling their memory of Western mysticism. Indeed, we are rediscovering ways to elicit the mystic and prophet from every person as well as to bring together mystical wisdom from all the world’s traditions... People desire today—as they did in the twelfth century Renaissance—to learn what science is saying about the universe and

how this awesome creation story relates to our religious heritage; they desire ritual that awakens, that truly heals and transforms instead of bores them; in their prayer and ritual, they desire to learn from the ancient and earth-centered ways of the native peoples of American, Africa, Asia and Europe; they want to be empowered by getting in touch with their creativity through art as meditation, which is the most basic form of mystical practice there is. They want to relate their mysticism to the struggle for justice. (Fox, 1988b: 23–37)

Jane Strohl, therefore, has a point when she argues that the “‘sheerly doxological” is one keynote of Matthew Fox’s paean to a renewed and reformed Christian spirituality’ (1988: 420). Indeed, this has another importance, in that, coupled with his charismatic, informal and flamboyant approach, his mystical immanence, praise of creation and our God-given creativity has engendered a sympathetic bond with contemporary spiritual seekers from within, and without the institutional Church.

2. Nature of the Study

The methodology, in part, consists of letting Fox speak through his works despite the inherent limitations of relying on Fox as a source for the biographical narrative. However, I have proceeded by treating Fox’s books as my primary source. These texts are Fox’s introductions to what he believes to be a revolutionary new path towards spiritual wholeness for ‘the masses’, rather than a monastic spirituality. While the nucleus of Fox’s thoughts are to be found in his first books they eventually came to fruition in the fourfold path and twenty-six themes unpacked in *Original Blessing* with its creation-centred spiritual journey. While this primary text is at the hub of Fox’s scheme, his autobiography *Confessions: The Making of a Post-Denominational Priest* and *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* were also key sources of information, in conjunction with the twenty-nine books and numerous articles and interviews that Fox has written and conducted.

In addition and in order to review and identify critical issues relative to Fox’s scholarship and the other areas of investigation that demanded it, I turned to relevant

scholarly texts, which presented alternative opinions and background information. These were specifically needed in relation to Chenu and the French Catholic Church, Robert Bly, Jewish thought, the Rhineland mystics, Wisdom literature, Sophiology and ecotheological thought. As to theses in the area, there has been no doctoral work and only two Masters theses. The principal of these, by David Keen, offers ‘a critique of Fox’s whole theological system in detail, in the fundamentals of Christian faith’ (1988: 3). This is quite different from the approach adopted here. I have chosen to follow in Fox’s footsteps while evaluating and critiquing as necessary, but always bearing in mind that Fox’s roots are exclusively entwined within his Catholic heritage.

3. Literature Review

While there are several scholarly articles discussing aspects of Fox’s work, there is, to date, no substantial published study. Likewise, there are, to date, only two theses that focus wholly on Fox’s work, neither of which are doctoral. The foundational critical perspective of John Meikle’s evaluation is that of a classical theist. Similarly, David Keen offers a critique of Fox’s theology from an Evangelical perspective. Concerning the latter, while Evangelicals are engaging more with Roman Catholic theology nowadays, the most common approach is that of a direct doctrinal comparison (Morehead, 2004: 279; see also Chirico, 2003; Baker, 2004). While some interesting insights can be gleaned from such an analysis, it, of course, needs to be borne in mind that Fox is not a contemporary American Evangelical grounded in an Evangelical commitment to biblical inspiration. Indeed, he is highly critical of this tradition. As such, it seems ridiculous to attack him for being insufficiently Evangelical.

As to the theses developed within the above dissertations, Keen’s ‘Talking about Creation in a Very Loud Voice: A Critique of Matthew Fox’s Creation Centred Spirituality’ (1988), whilst bearing the above comments in mind, it is actually a very useful survey and critique. It outlines Fox’s career, while exploring what he perceives to be Fox’s definitive statement, to be precise, the ‘Four Paths of creation spirituality’ and their subsequent development. Again, his principal approach is comparative, in that, with reference to ‘Evangelical orthodoxy’, he analyses Fox’s ideas about God, Father,

Son, Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the Goddess, worship and prayer, humanity, sin and salvation, creation eschatology and revelation. From his Evangelical perspective, these developments are situated within certain cultural trends of the twentieth century. Overall, the thesis provides a rejection of Fox's creation spirituality as an authentically Christian tradition. For example, he challenges Fox's assertion that the spirituality he presents us with is a redeemed ancient Christian tradition presented in a modern style and expression. He does this with reference to the environment debate, feminism, liberation theology, spiritual trends in psychology, and the New Age, seeking to establish that it is less the recovery of an ancient Christian tradition and more the construction of the contemporary alternative spirituality, which simply reflects current cultural trends. Basically, Keen's thesis is that Fox has departed from a 'Christian framework'. Therefore, again, he cannot convincingly claim to be a Christian theologian and creation spirituality cannot be considered Christian theology.

Meikle's 'Christian Evaluation of Matthew Fox's Creation Spirituality' (1985), focuses on three of Fox's books: *Original Blessing*; *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*; and *Creation Spirituality*. Meikle argues that Fox is at the vanguard of Western society's drive to redefine itself and its place on this earth. In particular, nature has become secularized and Fox's theology rests on the notion that mysticism and science have been unnecessarily separated in the West and that this has had a disastrous effect on spirituality and theology. However, unlike Keen, Meikle argues that, because of the ecological crisis, the Western Church ought to engage with, and develop Fox's ideas. To establish this point, Meikle argues from history, that the nineteenth century also witnessed the birth of a new literary movement, that flourished in New England, which also sought to 'redefine the place of humanity and the sacred, in nature'. Thus, this optimistic philosophy known as transcendentalism, is foundational to Fox's thought since they have key elements in common (1985: 3).

This is particularly evident in the work of Henry David Thoreau, John Muir and John Burroughs, who all emphasized the 'intrinsic value of nature... a belief that stemmed from their deistic understanding of untouched nature as being a medium for experiencing the First Cause of the universe' (1985: 3). This, Meikle argues, also finds a

theological response in the process theology of Alfred North Whitehead and the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Having said that, comparing Fox's thought to a 'theistic Christian understanding of God the Creator', he finds Fox wanting. While he applauds Fox's concern for the environment and recognizes his potential to add to the reworking of Christian theology, he argues that Fox is on a slippery slope towards pantheism and union with God. This, we will see, while a common critique of Fox, is to misunderstand the trajectory of his thought, which is fundamentally panentheistic.

Having noted the only two theses to discuss Fox's work in detail, it is worth noting three more studies that mention of him. Firstly, J. Cormuss's 'Visions of Creation in the Late Modern Age' (2006), argues that modern society has made unprecedented scientific and technological advances toward understanding, if not mastering, the world in which we live. Yet, this only serves to highlight the inability of science and technology to address the questions humanity pose. Science, she argues, appears to be in conflict with religion and her thesis examines four popular versions of the creation story-creation science, intelligent design, theistic evolution, and creation spirituality. Unfortunately, while Fox is considered, the analysis is limited. Fox is discussed with reference to the work of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, both of whom have been influenced by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and there is little unpacking of his work per se. Her emphasis is on the continuities between Fox, Berry, and Swimme concerning their approach to science and nature, and specifically their objective to re-establish a 'premodern sense of awe and reverence toward the natural world, in preparation for a universal transformation of consciousness...a pathway to planetary survival that entails a resacralization of the world' (2006: 53).

Secondly, J. Scherer's 'An Exploration of the Relationship between Christianity and the New Age Movement' (2002), sets out to 'chart and analyse the arguments that are being exchanged between the adherents of two belief systems' (2002: 3), the New Age views about Christianity and Christian responses to the New Age. Following this, Scherer introduces Fox's creation spirituality, arguing that it is an 'overlap between Christianity and the New Age Movement' (2002: 52) a form of what Daren Kemp has termed 'Christaquarianism' (Kemp, 2001).

Finally, Sea Raven's 'The Wheel of the Year: A Worship Book for Creation Spirituality' (2001), is an academic dissertation awarded by The University of Creation Spirituality. It provides an uncritical restatement of creation spirituality, arguing that the 'God worshipped by Christians in the early development of the Church is not the same Godde [sic] that is emerging among thoughtful people of faith on the threshold of the Third Millennium' (2001: 1).

4. Thesis Outline

As indicated above, the thesis examines the external influences that have impinged on Matthew Fox's thought. It argues that Chenu's theology has been foundational to his thinking. Even though he has augmented Chenu's thinking with Abraham Joshua Heschel, Martin Buber, Otto Rank and the influence of Robert Bly, Fox's panentheistic mystical understanding of the Cosmic Christ and its influence on his interpretation of global justice and ecotheology is rooted in the teaching he received at the Institut Catholique de Paris.

The first chapter begins by examining Fox's home life, education and his Dominican Training from 1958–1967, which laid the foundations for the rest of the dissertation. While Fox's enthusiastic memories of his studies in the Catholic seminary are littered with familiar names, it seems that the main influences arose from the work of Marie-Dominique Chenu, who was Fox's tutor in Paris. Secondly, I argue that Fox has aligned himself with the Jewish thought of Abraham Joshua Heschel, Martin Buber, Otto Rank and the magazine *Tikkun*. Thirdly, there is the silent pervasive influence of the poet Robert Bly and the book *Iron John*. Finally, Fox, having defied the Vatican was silenced and expelled by the Dominicans and the chapter ends with extracts from Fox's personal pastoral Letter to Cardinal Ratzinger, his critique of the Catholic Church, his entry into the Episcopalian church and an overview of his work.

In Chapter 2, I survey the three primary influences on Fox's spirituality. However, of necessity, I start with an examination of the history of the French Catholic Church from 1830 to 1958 and the worker-priest movement that, I argue, influenced Chenu's thinking. Subsequently, I look at Chenu and the development of Fox's theology of work,

as well as his discussion of Augustinian dualism, contemplation, incarnation and christology. This is followed by an investigation into the influential work of Buber and Heschel who grappled with two choices: 'reject the modern ideas that were prevalent and make religion, to all intents and purposes, oblivious or reject the tradition of religion and Judaism' (Gohl, 1997). Buber and Heschel were both touched by modernity and its new existentialist vocabulary, which they utilized to re-describe Judaism in a language that spoke to modern man. It is very clear that their work had a significant influence on Fox. Likewise, the next section examines the influence of Otto Rank's feminist thought and his concept of Jungian archetypes. Also influential, we will see was *Tikkun Magazine*, a bimonthly Jewish critique of politics, culture and society that is committed to justice, healing, and transforming the world in that it conspicuously echoes Fox's ideas of social justice. Finally, we, turn our attention to Robert Bly whose extended metaphor of *Iron John* has also affected Fox's work, despite the self-contradictions that have almost become Bly's signature.

In the third chapter, I will examine Fox's search for a mystical dimension, his rejection of Augustine and the diverse scholarly critique that has arisen in response. For example, Simon Tugwell and Barbara Newman have both offered a comprehensive analysis of Fox's work on the Rhineland mystics who, he argues, have articulated this vision of creation spirituality in its most inspired form. While he has been labelled a pagan, pantheist, monist, and identified with the New Age movement, Fox claims to be a panentheist. The chapter traces Fox's thesis via the four paths of creation spirituality and his understanding of God and creation. Finally, the mystical sacred dimension to his theology is examined, and the affinity with the Romantic Movement identified.

Chapter 4 concentrates on Matthew Fox's quest for the cosmic Christ in the Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament and the Church Fathers in comparison with his rather convoluted understanding of the historical Jesus. Fox claims that creation spirituality and the cosmic Christ is as old as creation and found in medieval visionaries, the wisdom literature in the Bible, and Eastern orthodoxy which is rooted in cosmological Wisdom as the ground of being. I then turn to the controversial Russian Sophiology

movement with which Fox shares many interests, particularly his thesis that Jesus was a channel for Wisdom.

Finally, the theme of Chapter 5 is Fox's interpretation of liberation theology in that mysticism, prophecy, prayer and social justice go together in Fox's creation spirituality and are one of his central concerns. I briefly look at Lynn White's famous critique of Christianity as the source of our environmental crisis. Following this, I examine Fox and Chenu's interconnected theories of global justice, eco-theology and a theology of work. Finally, I examine Fox's response to the ecological crisis, his response to the Gaia hypothesis and his vision for the healing of mother earth. A brief overview of the interconnectedness of *Gaia* the Goddess and eco-feminism in Fox's thought follows. A truly spirit-filled society, Fox argues, will come into being when compassion matures. Then morality (justice-making) and spirituality (a way of living lives of justice and the celebration of justice) will become one' (1999a: 33).

Chapter 1

The Life and Times of Matthew Fox

1. Introduction

Henry II (1133–1189), is alleged to have exclaimed in frustration, ‘will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?’, regarding Thomas à Becket (c. 1118–1170), the then chancellor of England and Archbishop of Canterbury (Schama, 2000: 141–42). It is tempting to imagine the identical sentiment emanating from the Roman Catholic Church regarding Matthew Fox OP, the controversial advocate of creation spirituality. Fox entered the Dominican Order in 1960, he was ordained into the priesthood in 1967 and remained within the order for thirty-four years. He received Master’s Degrees in both philosophy and theology from the Dominican Aquinas Institute, and later earned a PhD in spirituality with *maxima cum laude* (the French equivalent of *summa*), from the Institut Catholique de Paris (1997a: 65, 85–89).¹

Fox provoked attention when he began to advocate a form of New Age-Christian syncretism in an attempt to regenerate Western culture and what he understood to be the dry bones of modern Christianity. While it is sometimes argued that he amalgamated ‘New Age’ ideas with his Creation-Centred spirituality, Fox seeks to encourage the growth of ‘new wine’ out of ‘old wineskins’. Creation spirituality, he maintains, is an ancient feminist tradition, which includes the wisdom literature of Israel as well as being at the ‘heart of the mystical tradition of both the East and the West’ and the core belief of native peoples before Christianity arrived (Keen, 1989: 54–56). As Meister Eckhart said, ‘God is a great underground river of divinity’, and the wisdom within all religions tap into this one source (Fox, 1988a: 230).

Fox has developed an immanentist concept of a God who pervades the universe and indwells the individual. Creation spirituality, while seeking an authentic mysticism strives to counteract the dualism, which Fox understands to be inherent within Western Christianity while promoting a social and ecological welfare that would reconnect and combine the wisdom of ancient indigenous spiritual traditions with contemporary science. Unorthodox and independent, in due course, Fox became a

¹ The Dominicans downgraded his thesis to *magna cum laude*.

thorn in the Vatican's side and he was denounced as a 'dangerous radical, heretic and blasphemer' (Brown and Novick, 1993: n.p.). Nonetheless, George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury announced his appreciation of Fox's theology with its 'emphasis on the sacredness of creation' and the 'interconnectedness of all God's creation', Christian themes that the Church had neglected (Combe, 2001: n.p.).

Eventually, after a year of silence imposed by the Church in an attempt to suppress him, Fox was expelled from the Dominican Order. Subsequently, at his first public meeting, Fox greeted his audience with the words 'As I was saying fourteen months ago, before I was so rudely interrupted...', before returning to his perennial call for a rebirth in heart and Church. This rebirth would recover the lost cosmological earth-centred spirituality, while encouraging an outpouring of social action that would transform civilization (1990a: n.p.). In fact, the Church's strategy appears to have rebounded. Ironically, the controversy enhanced and increased Fox's public profile and the attempted silencing brought his teachings out of obscurity and into the limelight. Meanwhile, many Christians have continued to find his brand of Christian mysticism intellectually attractive and spiritually inspiring. Eventually, following this much publicized debacle, Fox was ordained as an Anglican priest by Bishop Swing in Grace Cathedral, California (1997a: 5).

Eventually, Fox created the foundations that led to his establishing the Institute for Culture and Creation Spirituality (ICCS) in 1977 at Mundelein College, in Chicago moving again to Holy Names College, in Oakland, California in 1983 (2001a: xviii). However, following his expulsion in 1996 Fox, in order to develop his academic programs and philosophy, launched the University of Creation Spirituality (UCS) as an autonomous institution within the heart of downtown Oakland. This new concept was to be a beacon of light and a paradigm of community in what Fox viewed as an ethically and spiritually declining world (Pacwa, 1992a: 14).

In his autobiography, *Confessions: The Making of a Post-Denominational Priest*, Fox describes himself as a 'spiritual pyromaniac' and a 'post-denominational priest in a postmodern environment' (1997a: 151, 246). Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the chronicling of his life in narrative form gave him the opportunity to share with the reader aspects of his 'dreams, inner life, its sources, its struggles, and its mystery' (1997a: 3). To some degree, it could be argued that the priest he became, his disputes

with the Catholic Church and his subsequent change of direction are all the result of the many people and experiences that have touched his life, many of which are documented in his autobiography. These diverse influences are the origins of his creative thinking, visionary perspective, theology and spirituality and are the views I wish to explore in this initial context-setting chapter.

2. Family Life in the Mystical State of Wisconsin

(a) The Formative Years

The fourth child in a family of seven, Timothy Fox was born on the winter solstice of 1940 in Madison, Wisconsin, which he describes, as a landscape with an ‘infinite mystical dimension’ that has influenced his spiritual development and theology.

Growing up in Wisconsin, with its sense of natural beauty and the Native American morphic resonance and spirits on the land...plus the social justice struggles of the 1960s. All of my writings are about bringing together the mysticism of awe and wonder with the struggle for eco and social justice. (Hollyhock Centre, 1997: n.p.)

Numerous descriptions of an idyllic rural upbringing, where he was free to roam without hindrance confirm his deep-rooted love of the land. This intense empathy with the environment fostered a relationship that Fox describes as a ‘spirit presence’, which affected his later spiritual meditations. Consequently, the retrospective observations he makes in his autobiography, regarding his immediate family and the subsequent path that his life took are revealing (1997a: 21). While Beatrice, his mother, played a seminal role in his life, Fox’s authoritative Irish father, George, educated by Augustinian monks, had a naive and literal understanding of Catholic teaching. Conversely, despite upholding the faith, he appears to have had a degree of sympathy towards the feminist cause.

In contrast to George’s conventional Catholic background, Beatrice’s maternal roots, albeit non-practising, were Jewish. Her mother converted to Episcopalianism on her marriage whiles Fox’s maternal grandfather was unambiguously ‘antipapist’ and neither parent approved of her marriage to George (1997a: 44–47, 50). Beatrice’s catechetical instruction was rigorously Episcopalian but Fox describes her eventual

disclosure of his Jewish roots as a ‘moving moment of revelation’ (1997a: 50). Henceforth, he perceived himself as inexorably linked to the survivors of the holocaust and eligible for persecution himself, under different circumstances (1997a: 45–49).

Despite her unconventional background, in due course Beatrice pragmatically and surreptitiously decided to convert to Roman Catholicism. Having located a progressive priest, with whose teaching she was comfortable, Beatrice took instruction and ultimately surprised the whole family by joining them at the communion rail. She was spiritual rather than religious and never took the notion of religion per se seriously and was prone to walking out of church if she disapproved of the interpretation of scripture emanating from the pulpit (1997a: 43–51, 171).

Opportunistically, her apathy also excused her from serving fish on a Friday, which, to the consternation of the family, she frequently forgot. She accorded the Second Vatican Council her tacit approval since it appeared to confirm her belief that the use of the Rosary and Latin were outmoded concepts. An avid reader, liberated and intelligent, Beatrice took an active part in the community’s feminist social scene, and Fox, due to his age, appears to have attended many of these women’s meetings with her (1997a: 43–51, 171).² A family with a deep-seated ecumenical ethos who offered hospitality to the many Catholic, Protestant and Jewish friends and students, from diverse creeds and ethnic backgrounds, they encountered (1997a: 45–49, 57).

Contemplating his experiences in church, especially the readings from the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Bible, Fox describes it as a cosmological mystery from a bygone age where the goddess was paramount. Nonetheless, his ecumenical upbringing and the disclosure about his Jewish heritage appears to have motivated and nurtured Fox’s predilection towards Jewish mysticism. He continues to find inspiration in the Hebrew Scriptures and rabbinic literature, especially that of Abraham Joshua Heschel. Heschel, who was influenced by *Hasidism* and the *Kabala*, was a prominent social activist during the Civil Rights movement with

² Though Fox does not describe his mother as a ‘feminist’ per se, the timescale fits in with what is termed the modern feminist movement, the so-called ‘second wave’. This movement was influenced and defined, in Europe, by Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) the French existentialist and social essayist who analysed the status of women (Martin, 1994: 155–57; cf. Beauvoir, 1949).

Martin Luther King, and he in turn has influenced Fox's Spirituality (Kimelman, 1983: 9–18).

(b) The Years in High School

At the age of twelve, Fox developed poliomyelitis and this enforced period of stillness and sensitization introduced him to the qualities of 'joy, trust and solitude', which would eventually nurture his inner life. Life revolved around the Church with its many transforming experiences.³ Serving as an altar boy on Sunday enabled him to absorb the silence and mystery of the six Latin masses he attended. Singing the Gregorian chants, attending requiem mass, celebrating Mary's Feast Day and commemorating the imponderable 'ecstasy of God becoming bread' left an impression, which in hindsight, he now describes as 'entering the Mysteries', and a valuable education in the critical appraisal of theology and the art of preaching (1997a: 51, 56).

These teenage years were seminal. Fox's vocation manifested itself and Leo Tolstoy's concept of 'soul work...blew his soul wide open' (1997a: 59). *War and Peace*, with its panoramic view of life, reinforced his calling, it opened his eyes to the notion that spirituality and art could not be separated, a concept that Marie-Dominique Chenu eventually reinforced. Revealingly, Fox observes that he was no longer just 'his father's son', it was a time of liberation, from all paternal influences and culture that expanded his spiritual horizons within the Church and community, he formed his own identity. Fox reveals that his father, while originally supportive, did not approve of the controversial socio-political perspective within his developing theology and ministry and he never actually read any of Fox's books (1997a: 51–53). However, in defence of George and, considering his educational background, the relative dryness of academic books and their irrelevance to most people, it is hardly surprising.

³ The services at this time would have taken the form of a Tridentine mass the Eucharistic liturgy used by the Roman Catholic Church from 1570 to 1964. However, Paul VI's decree *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in 1963 eliminated any additions to the liturgy that would obscure its purpose and basic outline. This amendment was dramatic in that it facilitated the translation of the liturgy and rites of the church from their traditional Latin into the modern vernacular thus, letting a breath of fresh air into the seminaries during Fox's training (Wainwright, 1997: 339–44).

Interestingly, Fox was educated at a non-Catholic public school, where the broad curriculum fed his inquisitive intellect, nourished his developing love of literature, his interest in the politics of his day and ecumenism.⁴ He made his first retreat and became acquainted with the writings of Thomas Merton, with their implicit promise of an encounter with God. Fox was inspired and eventually his parish priest suggested that he should enter the Dominican Order on the strength of their meditative, preaching and teaching ministry. Having made a retreat to the Dominican house of studies he decided to ‘follow his heart’ and the spiritual path to Rome, a journey that would ultimately lead to acceptance into the Episcopal priesthood in 1994 (1997a: 5–7, 59).

3. A Rite of Passage—Dominican Training 1958–1967

(a) A Quasi-Dominican Life at Loras College

Fox was eighteen when he entered Loras College in Dubuque in 1958 to begin the required two years of college that would eventually enable him to enter the Dominican novitiate programme. He now felt in control of his own destiny and on the road to independence and while his love of sport and the outdoor life continued, his academic pursuits flourished with the study of Latin, ancient history and English. As humankind emerged from the shadow of World War Two, in the fifties and sixties, there was a palpable longing for change after the austerity of the post-war years and with the birth of ‘rock and roll’ the swinging sixties were infused with a sense of freedom. In 1961 John Kennedy became President of America and much to Fox’s delight, despite the customary prohibition on outside pursuits and television, because Kennedy was a Catholic the students were allowed to listen to his inaugural address to the nation (1997a: 18, 60).

⁴ Given that, Fox was twelve when he had polio this was post-1952. Even so, he was aware of the political scene, the anti-communist atmosphere that pervaded the country and the McCarthy witch-hunts that gripped America. In the early 1950s, the republican Joseph Raymond McCarthy (1908–1957) represented the state of Wisconsin. He attracted national attention with his charge that the Communist party had infiltrated the Department of State. Subsequently, he led a campaign against this supposed ‘Communist subversion’ and repeatedly accused various high-ranking officials of seditious activities. It was a measure of the atmosphere of the times that his charges were taken seriously and maybe this affected Fox’s politics as he eventually supported the democrat John F. Kennedy. For additional information on the history of McCarthyism from its origins in the 1930s through to its escalation in the 1940s and its decline in the 1950s (Navasky, 2001: 1; cf. Schrecker, 2002).

Simultaneously, the Civil Rights movement was born and Martin Luther King's plea for a non-violent response in the face of oppression and his many speeches focused the nation's concern on the issues of social justice, action and human dignity. Reminiscing, Fox portrays King as a man who willingly embraced the *Via Negativa* to become truly vulnerable, an authentic mystic who was engaged in a cosmic activity. King's acceptance of personal racist attacks and unwarranted suffering as a redemptive catalyst, plus his stance for righteousness, justice and truth, captured Fox's imagination (1988a: 49, 61).

In 1958, just as Fox was beginning his novitiate training, Pope Pius XII died eight years after he had issued his encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950). However, metaphorically, because he was 'thin, gaunt, aristocratic and pious', he came to represent an 'ascetic spirituality' (1997a: 18, 60). The political and spiritual climate within the hierarchical confines of the Church was anti-intellectual and dictatorial. Nonetheless, the French progressive theologians had already begun to explore radical new ideas even though the Church viewed their 'modernist' ideas as seditious. While their books were eventually published in the sixties, in an inquisitional-style crusade, Yves Congar, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Alfred F. Loisy and Marie Dominique Chenu were threatened with:

- the listing of all their books in the 'Index of Prohibited Books';
- the manipulation of clerical careers;
- official condemnations issued by Vatican bodies;
- the creation of institutional structures for the detection of heresy within the church;
- the excommunication of dissidents.

(Lyng and Kurtz, 1995: 904, 911)

(b) Novitiate Training in Minnesota and the Emergence of Brother Matthew

Formal novitiate training for entry into the priesthood now began in Winona, Minnesota. The raw initiates were assigned a new name and abruptly Timothy Fox became Brother Matthew. Weeks later, following his investiture and attired in the white Dominican habit, this change of identity was reinforced and the novitiates

prepared for the severing of former bonds and the final parting with their families. With the benefit of hindsight Fox, now perceives this as a necessary and important ‘rite of passage’ for the raw youth that he was. Despite appearing linguistically and theologically austere at the time, he describes the whole experience as idyllic. It defined a stage in his life, the beginning of adulthood (1997a: 18, 19).

The days began at five in the morning with a church service. While the novices ate their meals with their faces covered by their *capuches* (hoods), the all-encompassing silence was punctuated by the occasional *gaudeamus* and the reading from a selected text by a solitary novice, who was chided for any mispronunciations by the attending novice master. Academically, he grappled with translating the Psalms from Latin into English while learning to practise the art of silent contemplation and an introduction to the writing of St Teresa of Avila (1995) the Spanish nun who reformed the Carmelite Order in the 1500s (Fox, 1997a: 19). Her books testify to a medieval nun’s intense ‘religious awakening’, in that they reveal a disciplined woman whose love of contemplative prayer led to a deep spirituality (Devoy, 2000: 536–37). Fox, however, elevates her to a ‘spiritual warrior’ who challenged both the Catholic Church and the Spanish Inquisition (2001b: 318).

Following an altercation with a fellow novitiate, Fox, was suddenly assailed by a crisis of vocation but as Fr Clancy cautioned him: ‘There will be moments in the order when you will be scandalised and disappointed. Don’t go the way of everybody else, if your conscience tells you otherwise’ (1997a: 19, 20). Considering his future confrontation with Cardinal Ratzinger, Fox apparently took the advice and followed his conscience rather than his vocation as a Catholic priest.

Despite comparing this initiation time to a ‘boot camp’, it is obvious that the brief spell at Loras Dubuque holds many happy memories. Fox compares this intense interlude in his life with an idyllic garden portrayed in the book *Iron John* by Robert Bly.⁵ Allegorically and with hindsight, in 1996 Fox understood the ‘garden’ to symbolize his novitiate training, his personal ‘sabbatical with a purpose’ and a place to develop a ‘deep introversion.’ This was an interlude that allowed him to linger

⁵ It is the tale of a quest, which becomes a vehicle for Bly’s eclectic revamping of supposed male initiation rites (Zipes, 1992: 8) and for an analysis of the significance of this text for Fox, see Chapter 2 below.

before facing the rigour of exacting academic work, his final vows and the responsibilities and controversies that would eventually impinge on his time (1997a: 22, 246).

Hugh White wrote, ‘The past cannot be changed. The future is still in your power’ (Cook, 207: 671), and Fox’s memories and reflections in his autobiography in 1997, seem to have acquired a safe and sanguine perspective no matter what the future holds. However, the world judges Fox’s actions, the young contemplative novitiate that he remembers in the garden in Dubuque has gone forever. Today, as a mature priest, he has asserted himself spiritually and intellectually and become autonomous. He has followed his own desires and turned his back on the vows of obedience that he once took.

(c) Dominican Studies at Chicago

Three years later, having taken his final vows and donned his new Roman collar and black hat, Fox began reading philosophy, at the monastic ‘House of Studies’. Academic life proved to be rigorous since the lectures were conducted in Latin but this period at Illinois gave Fox the latitude to reason, deliberate, appraise and seek spiritual insight. It was an introduction to the existentialist thinkers, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the psychologists Carl Gustav Jung, Carl Rogers, Alfred Adler, Karen Horney and Sigmund Freud (1997a: 25).

Theologically among the important thinkers he encountered were Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, while the ethics lectures were based on Aquinas’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Ethics and Politics*. Father Weisheiple, who introduced the students to fourteenth-century science and religion, would eventually denounce Fox’s writing, having taken umbrage at his use of the words ‘spirituality’ and ‘sensuality’ in the same sentence. Had Father Weisheiple, who patently did not countenance fourteenth-century women mystics in his repertoire, read Julian of Norwich, Fox observes in a riposte, he would have encountered the concept of ‘sensual spirituality’ (1997a: 24–28; see also Julian of Norwich, 1998).

Time Magazine declared that ‘the Year of our Lord 1962 was a year of American resolve, Russian orbiting, European union and Chinese war’ (1963a: n.p.). However,

it is possible that 1962's most pivotal event took place in the Vatican, where Pope John XXIII was instigating an insurrection via the second Vatican Council. Rejecting what had been the historical norm he, deliberately set out to embrace the far-reaching changes in 'science, economics, morals and politics; the church was to become more Catholic and less Roman' (1963a: n.p.). Suddenly, the French theologians were re-established and their work studied. While Hans Küng was categorized as a rebel, because he questioned papal authority and claims of infallibility, the seminarians were ironically allowed to attend his lecture entitled, 'Is there a difference between the *modus operandi* of the Vatican and that of the Kremlin'. Fox admits that this question has remained at the forefront of his thinking (1997a: 24).

Fox graduated, having written his BA thesis on 'the proof for God as found in Aristotle's *Physics* and Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* while his MA in Philosophy examined 'Immanuel Kant and the proof for God's existence' (1997a: 24). Meanwhile, the publishing of John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* (1963b), which addressed the issues of human rights, infused Fox with enthusiasm. It affected him to such an extent that, incongruously, it was to the 'person of John XXIII and his vision' of an ecumenical church that he eventually addressed his final vows (1997a: 26–28). During the service, which he describes as 'simple and stark', Fox received a prophetic vision that depicted a 'bare foot, bloody and moving through mud and rain. Later, he interpreted this as the 'warrior' side of his vocation and as we will see, this may be an allusion to the 'garden' and the result of Bly's influence (1997a: 26–28). However, as he freely admits, the vows of celibacy, obedience and poverty, now that they have been 'deprivatized' and widened to encompass an extended society, have been undeniably more challenging than he ever foresaw.

(d) Theological Studies at Dubuque

While this move was a welcome return to a rural setting, St Rose Priory, the theology school, was also the crux of ecumenical activity. Its association with the local Lutheran and Presbyterian seminaries involved an interchange of professors, which ensured a distinctive ecumenical training and social interaction. However, a new experience was looming and with the reading of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962), which examined the setting of human existence in the world, Fox began to focus on the concept of 'being' rather than 'doing'. With the deepening of his

mystical awareness and enticed by the concept of a hermitic contemplative way of life, he resolved to spend the summer at the austere Trappist hermitage in Dubuque (1997a: 28–29).

He discovered later that his provincial, who was opposed to the idea, had written to the Trappist Abbott urging him not to entice ‘Brother Matthew’ away from the Dominican Order. In an inexplicable comment, which he does not clarify, Fox defines this as a crucial moment in his progress. He remarks, ‘I left the priesthood before I entered it. For that reason I have always had a relationship with the priesthood that was nonpossessive and somewhat playful. The priesthood was something I let go of early on’ (1997a: 29). Fox does not make it clear to which incident he is referring. Is it his experience at the Trappist hermitage or his admitted naivety concerning the Machiavellian tendencies within certain ecclesiastical politics?

The journey west, ‘literally and metaphorically’, was ‘paradoxical wild and beautiful’, a profound experience outwardly and inwardly, as Fox sought to test his calling and encounter God anew (1997a: 29–30). Traditionally, Christian spirituality has been viewed as two-dimensional. Faith in action encompasses the daily discipline of life and our experiences within the monastery, church or community. Equally, Christian spirituality is also a lived experience, where the objective is the pursuit of the highest goal, union with God. As William Blake wrote, ‘we are put on earth for a little space that we may learn to bear the beams of love’ (2004: 87), and Blake expresses succinctly the impetus that appears to have motivated Fox as he journeyed towards Vancouver. His overwhelming need was to seek ‘solitude, silence, to be sought and seen by God, and achieve mystical union with the divine’ (1997a: 29–30).

While he was immediately exposed to a panentheistic experiential revelation of ‘God in us and us in God’ (1997a: 32–33) it was a solitary experience that exposed him to physical austerity, love and the art of listening to God, others and himself. The questions that he faced concerned the nature of his vocation. Was God calling him to withdraw from an active ministry to engage in contemplative prayer? Alternatively, was he to return to the Dominican fold with its ‘apostolic demands’? Father

Winandy, having read Fox's journal, confirmed his vocation as a Dominican, and Fox returned energized having learned to trust God's guidance (1997a: 32–33).

Immediately on his return Fox began to edit *Listening*, a student magazine, which attempted to address relevant cultural issues and the dialogue between science and spirituality. The magazine interviewed and published the writing of eminent theologians such as Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Jürgen Moltmann, Hans Küng and Yves Congar. Fox was especially impressed with an article by Chenu on 'The End of the Constantine Era', in which Chenu expressed the need for the church to divorce itself from the 'privileges and world view' of the imperial Constantine Era.⁶ When *Listening*, with his provincial's approval, published a critique of *Playboy* and Hugh Hefner, the external carping and antagonism that ensued from among the higher-ranking clerics made him aware, yet again, of his political naivety about politics (1997a: 35).

Theologically, he became engrossed in Rahner's theology, which comprehended the world as the profoundly mysterious realm of an incomprehensible God's dialogue with humanity (1997a: 38). However, it was Rahner's essay, 'Priest and Poet' (1967: 294–317), and his concept of the use of poetry as a catalyst for prayer and inspiration that affected Fox's future deliberations. According to Benedict Auer, Rahner, basing his premise on Aquinas's thinking, argued that an incomprehensible God could also be known. While God could feasibly have disclosed the '*deus revelatus*' to us, knowledge resided in the profound mystery of the '*deus absconditus*', the provenance of all truths before whose omnipresence all mortals stand in awe. Rahner was intrigued by the role of language in the creative act of composing poetry, and he argued that the priest was a poet who articulated the deepest experiences of the human heart. He remarked, 'for one can be a poet only when the word of the mouth breaks forth from the centre of the heart. The poet says what he bears within himself' (1992: 34–46).

⁶ In 1961, Chenu, presented a paper entitled '*La fin de l'ère constantinienne*' in preparation for the Second Vatican Council. 'This paper was used by the anti-Nazi historian Friedrich Heer in the context of an anti-totalitarian historical analysis culminating in the end of Nazism'. Eventually, Chenu wrote *The Church and the World* in the light of *Gaudium et Spes* (Zamagni, 2008: 113–38).

Poetry as a discipline, Rahner argues, enables one to be attentive to the ‘word of life’. The poet’s ‘primordial words’ may penetrate the unfathomable God, while inspired poets are in touch with their inner self (Auer, 1993: n.p.). Living in transcendence, in some undefined way, they touch the divine. Rejecting the concept of a priest in the Roman sacramental tradition, Rahner argues that the definitive intermediary would be the poet who was a priest or a priest who was also a poet and mediator of the unrevealed heart of God—having said that, most poets are not priests. Moreover, if priests utter God’s ‘primordial words’ without inspiration and revelation they are not poets (Auer, 1993: n.p.). The priest must seek the poet within, and enlightenment from historical writers such as Aquinas. Meanwhile, the Church, if necessary, must pursue those disaffected secular poets who, despite being disestablished, articulate God’s ‘primordial words’ to an atheistic world (Auer, 1993: n.p.).

Rahner’s insight, according to Fox, saved him from the sin of prosaic theology. It gave him the impetus to explore and develop the concept of ‘right-brain’ spirituality. Rahner’s ideas germinated and Fox’s began to concentrate on bridging the gap between spirituality, social justice and poetry, as well as art, painting, music and dance (1995a: 207, 214). As he argues ‘we cannot do heart work without artwork. We make our hearts grow through imaging and dancing and music’ (1990a: n.p.).

As the time at St Rose drew to an end, Fox, due to his ever-increasing penchant for the mystical, began to seek the support of a Spiritual Director for supervision. Finally, recognizing what he believed to be a dearth of mystical experience within the Dominican Order, he volunteered himself for further training in spirituality. Having rejected his superior’s choice of Spain and the Spanish Carmelite movement and even Rome itself, he wrote to Thomas Merton for advice. It was a pivotal decision (1997a: 40).

Merton recommended that Fox should apply to study at the Institute Catholique in Paris. The French Dominicans had gained a reputation for being headstrong, while the Institute Catholique was renowned as a seedbed of theological dissent therefore, Fox’s superiors were ambivalent because every American Dominican who had studied in Paris had left the Dominican fold. Nevertheless, Fox was ordained in May 1976. He celebrated his first mass, finished his second Master’s thesis in theology on

‘The Prayer of Jesus in the New Testament and its Significance for a Contemporary Theology of Prayer’, and turned his face towards Paris and, what was to prove a momentous meeting with Chenu (1997a: 40–42).⁷

(e) Spirituality and Père Chenu at the Institute Catholique (1967–1970)

Life in Paris seems to have come as a cultural shock; Fox’s French was non-existent and his lodgings primitive. His landlady’s politics were the antithesis of his, a member of the *Integrists*, the right wing movement within French Catholicism, she supported the Vietnam War and was virulently anti-Semitic. Simultaneously, political unrest pervaded the air as students rioted against the de Gaulle government. Despite all this, Fox explored the local culture Notre Dame, the cafés in the Latin Quarter, the holocaust monument on the Ile de la Cité, the open-air markets, and especially the museums and art galleries. This immersion into French culture stimulated the poet within, and life took on a different perspective (1997a: 61–67). The ‘Catho’, an appellation for the Institute Catholique, while administratively chaotic, provided a solid foundation in the history, theologies and methodology of the Western spiritual traditions while simultaneously encouraging creative thinking. Fox immersed himself in this milieu, confronted the ‘relativity’ of his American culture and, while his linguistic limitations constrained him, his objective was unambiguous from the start, as he states:

I came to Paris with one pressing, urgent question that superseded all other concerns for me: what is the relationship—if any—between prayer and social justice? I felt that was the most foundational issue for me and possibly for my generation. (1997a: 61–67)

While some courses were inappropriate, many were beyond his limited French. Fox observes that much of his theology has been a reaction to Cagnet’s lectures on Western spiritualities, which covered Karl Marx, Freud, ‘death of God’ theologies and the hypothesis that the subjectivism of Protestant and Catholic spiritualities was obsolete in the twentieth century. Cagnet also emphasized Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s

⁷ Chenu, as we will see, became Fox’s mentor, while his theology seemingly became the cornerstone of Fox’s thought.

stress on the importance of spiritualities that incorporate the ‘body, justice making, a sense of history and evolution therefore, spiritualities of matter that are cognisant with science’ (1997a: 67).

Eventually, the pressing question of how to amalgamate ‘mysticism and the problems of social justice, the integration of Jewish spirituality, the issue of dualism, politics and prayer, body and spirit, science, spirituality and religion’ coalesced when Fox attended Chenu’s seminar in the Spring of 1968. He describes Chenu as charismatic, egalitarian and an avid exponent of twelfth-century art and archaeology. Moreover, despite his silencing by Pius XI, Chenu apparently harboured no animosity and viewed the Church and his cardinalship with a self-effacing humour. The author of *The Church in the Modern World*, Chenu was convinced that any future Catholic renewal would arise from amongst the laity. Moreover, it was Chenu who drew Fox’s attention to the two traditional disciplines within spirituality, the fall/redemption and the Creation-Centred spirituality (1997a: 70–71). As Fox confirms:

It was he [Chenu] who identified by name the creation-centered spiritual tradition when I was studying with him in Paris. The fact that I found a mentor in him was very important. He cleared the way for me by naming this spiritual tradition of the West that combined mysticism and prophecy, spirituality, art and social justice. For this was the single most pressing question, I brought with me to Paris: How if at all, can we relate spirituality and social justice? (Fox and Sheldrake, 1997b: 3)

As the sixties ended, the anti-Vietnam riots in America were intensifying and the Church was being shaken out of its torpidity by John XXIII. In his final months in Paris, Fox worked on the patriotic *Time Magazine* while exploring liberation theology’s Marxist perspective and passion for social justice. He then spent his final semester at the University of Münster in Germany, studying Marxism and the current political theological issues. Finally, inspired by Chenu’s exhortation that ‘the greatest tragedies in theology in the last three hundred years have been the separation of the theologian from the poet, the dancer, the painter, the dramatist, the potter and the film-maker’ (1997a: 63, 76–86), he returned home. Following this interlude in Paris,

Fox's life gained an order and direction it had never had. It also gained a notoriety that he never in his ecclesiastical naivety could have predicted.

(f) A Confrontation with Cardinal Ratzinger

The 1970s witnessed Fox's return to the Dominican fold and, in what appears to be an immediate response to Chenu's admonition, the publication of his first book (2001a: xxi). However, Fox's theory of 'sensual spirituality' and the accusation that he had concelebrated mass with an Anglican priest brought his work and ministry under Vatican scrutiny (1997a: 99). Fox himself dates the decline and fall in his relationship with Rome to 1979 following his address at a gay and lesbian convention in Seattle. Subsequently, his books were placed under theological investigation (1997a: 124–27).⁸ The original Dominican enquiry in 1985 exonerated him because, it found his work too shallow to be dangerous (Pacwa, 1992a: 14). Nevertheless, in 1986, Ratzinger demanded that Fox should stop teaching and, in 1987, the Vatican instigated its own investigation. Eventually, in 1988 they judged that the theology expressed in *Original Blessing* was unbalanced (1988b: 4–5).

The primary criticisms, as recorded by Mitch Pacwa, touched on Fox's lack of emphasis on the doctrine of original sin; his refusal to deny a belief in pantheism; the endorsing of homosexual unions in the Church; identifying humans as 'mothers of God;' and calling God 'our Mother' (1992a: 14). This litany of sins was compounded by the *avant-garde* faculty at ICCS and, especially, the presence of the self-styled Jewish witch Starhawk, whose book *The Spiral Dance* (1997) was pivotal in bringing goddess worship to the religious forefront.⁹ Accordingly, in December 1988, Fox was ordered not to speak publicly or to publish his writings for a year. His immediate response was the now infamous letter to Cardinal Ratzinger (1997a: 170).

⁸ These were, *On Becoming a Musical Mystical Bear; Whee! We, wee all the Way Home*, and *Original Blessing* (Fox, 1997a: 164).

⁹ Starhawk's real name is Miriam Simos, but is best known by her pseudonym. A self-proclaimed 'witch' and pagan, she became involved with 'feminism and witchcraft' at the *University of California, Los Angeles*...she was initiated into the craft in 1972...and became the elected leader of the "Covenant of the Goddess" in 1976'. Starhawk celebrates the Goddess and a feminist earth-based spirituality while advocating environmental and global justice (Marini, 2003: 170–73).

4. Pastoral Letter to Cardinal Ratzinger in 1988

In April 1988, Cardinal Ratzinger wrote to the Master General of the Dominicans in Rome with a formal complaint and a brief assessment of Fox's book *Original Blessing* which he considered to be dangerous and deviant and far removed from authentic Christian thought.

Not only has Father Fox not ceased to promote his unbalanced notions of original blessing, he is engaged to present them to audiences all over the U.S. and beyond.... [N]ew personages have been added to the faculty of his Institute which call ever more into question its Catholic character. (Ratzinger, 1988: 25)

Fox's reply addressed to a 'brother Christian' was originally published in *Creation Magazine* however, since the letter was never answered, Fox has published it online for the world to read (1988b: 23–37).¹⁰ Fox claimed that he was being silenced for political rather than theological reasons and he likened the Church to a dysfunctional family of 'third-rate theologians'. While aligning himself to his fellow theologians who were being persecuted, Fox concedes that Ratzinger might have some difficulty in understanding the theology involved since English was not his first language. However on reflection, he argues, the 'real issue is not your inability to read carefully: it is your determination to read with a closed mind... I detect a kind of intellectual sloth in those who condemn without studying, and a spiritual sloth in those who accuse without feeling the oppression of others (1988b: 23–37). Furthermore, there are 'three pastoral issues' that need addressing if the Church and civilization is to have a future (1988b: 23–37).

- There is a 'deep dissatisfaction from cardinals about your...support of Opus Dei';
- I hear bishops telling jokes about the Vatican and begging that the pope not come to their diocese lest it, too, be thrown into insurmountable debt;

¹⁰ I have used Fox's own words where possible. However the actual letter consists of nearly five thousand words. While I have omitted his teaching on creation spirituality I have attempted to convey the sentiment behind this letter. Read in totality, Fox's irony conveys his scorn and anger (1988b).

- I hear leaders of religious orders telling me that your Congregation has ‘nothing but third-rate theologians in it’... Yet no one tells you these things. Everyone refuses to confront the person who most needs to hear the truth...

Meanwhile there are ‘ten parallels within the...Church today that convinces me that our church is indeed a dysfunctional family, a dysfunctional organization’ (1988b: 23–37).

1 The Vatican’s best priests and sisters are leaving, have left, or simply ignore the folly ensuing from it. The Vatican ignores the advice of its...bishops and leaders... Instead it listens to theologically illiterate fanatics [and] reads rabid, ultraconservative newspapers totally lacking journalistic credibility.

2. The Vatican’s obsession with sex is a worldwide scandal... In Ireland this is referred to as the ‘pelvic morality’ of the Catholic Church... Misogyny in the church grows daily as the hierarchy accepts married clergy from the Anglican Church so long as they are abandoning their tradition over the issue of women’s ordination. Now we have married clergy—not Catholics but ex-Anglicans—who could not accept ordained women...

3. Illusions of grandiosity are a kind of ‘fix’...the heightened sense of power that members of a modern-day Inquisition feel who share vicariously in the illusion of power is another kind of ‘fix’.

4. Part of this illusion of grandiosity is an ‘illusion of control’—games that the Vatican plays that are nothing more than control games... The Vatican—like any organization—is not God, cannot be God, and will ultimately fail in its attempts to be God. It is a ‘morally bankrupt organization’.

5. A dysfunctional organization communicates only indirectly.

6. The Vatican lost the memory of the spirit and work of the Second Vatican Council...it has also lost most of the memory of its own mystical roots...[thus] we are frequently unable to learn from past mistakes. The Vatican erred in the sixteenth century in missing the point of Luther's effort to reform the church.

7. The magisterium is failing to grasp its own spiritual heritage and to teach it...and to offer that Spirit as a creative gift to the cultures of our world... The church's failure...constitutes a grave sin of omission.

8. A dysfunctional family or organization refuses to engage in self-evaluation and self-criticism. In its arrogance it sees all its problems as coming from the outside.

9. A dysfunctional organization practices isolation. This 'allows it to persist in seeing its reality as the only reality' when it stays 'out of touch with...those it serves, and with the society at large'.

10. The dysfunctional organization wants to kill the future...[but] the only future for the church is spirituality and the Vatican's bureaucratic games are not the future.

This behaviour is identical to that which goes on in a dysfunctional family... There is a time for patience and a time for impatience; a time for obedience and a time for disobedience—or a deeper obedience than that exacted by human laws and institutions. There is a time for continuity and a time for discontinuity. Ours are times...for holy impatience, disobedience, and discontinuity... My conscience urges me to speak out, to break my silence.

By this letter I consciously step out of that process and wish to tell the people what is really happening in our church. (1988b: 23–37)

Moreover, Fox argues with no 'vision for the future—with no eschatology—ministers in the church are burning out'. The Church is sick, 'yet through this

sickness much evil can happen and is happening in the Roman Catholic Church of our time.’

5. From Roman Catholicism to the Episcopalian Church

Providence played its final hand when Fox visited Leonardo Boff and took the opportunity to explore his interest in Liberation theologies. Fox inevitably links himself with Boff explaining that the reasons given by the Vatican for his expulsion was false. He was expelled he argues because ‘Creation Spirituality is a movement similar to Liberation Theology... I was expelled the same year that...Boff...was pressured out of his order’ (Lee, 1997: 6–7).

Fox continued with his normal agenda, while at the same time visiting Findhorn, the New Age community in Scotland,¹¹ in December 1989. However, in 1991, he was ordered to leave ICCS and return to Chicago or face expulsion. Fox refused and the Vatican officially gave notice of his dismissal in 1993, while he would remain a priest, he was forbidden to celebrate the sacraments (Pacwa, 1992a: 14).

On the 8th January 1994, Fox became an ordained Episcopalian Priest. The situation was intolerable for many of his followers, “‘The Episcopal Church is being used to give Matthew Fox credibility’”, claimed Guy Fitch Lytle, who taught at Berkeley and knew Fox, “‘He wants the authority of the priesthood without the accountability’” (Rourke, 1996: 1). On the other hand, in his review of Fox’s autobiography, Douglas LeBlanc remarks, ‘Matthew Fox has the exegetical and theological savvy to become a bishop in the postmodern Episcopal Church. You read it here first’ (1997: 51).

6. An Overview of Fox’s Work

This intellectual biography offers insights into the development and creative thinking within Fox’s work and specifically, I have highlighted the continuity of thought with Chenu’s previous scholarship. However, this is by no means a definitive list of Fox’s published papers, many of which are out-of-print. While Fox’s work has been criticized for being unsystematic and eclectic, it is actually consistent throughout and

¹¹ The Findhorn programme, 1996, declared, ‘while we have no formal doctrine or creed, we believe that humanity is involved in an evolutionary expansion of consciousness which is creating new patterns of civilization and a planetary culture infused with spiritual values’ (Sutcliffe, 2003: 150).

systematically develops a particular thesis. Once the connection with Chenu has been established, the underlying hypothesis becomes clear. While idiosyncratic the connection with his Roman Catholic roots are clearly evident in his earlier work, though he departs from orthodox Catholic thought in *Original Blessing* and moves away from traditional Christology in *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*.

A priest, teacher and theologian, Fox is a prolific author. His first three books have been understood as a response to his experience of the sixties, Vatican II and Chenu's admonition that, to bring healing to the Church, holistic methodologies had to embrace the 'theologian the poet, the dancer, the painter, the dramatist, the potter and the film-maker' (1997a: 63) and, in fact, all the people of God in the modern world. The first book, *Prayer: A Radical Response to Life*, originally published as *On Becoming a Musical Mystical Bear*, and his publishing company Bear & Company, were inspired by what Fox subsequently interpreted as a 'healing dream' of a dancing bear and a couplet by T. S. Eliot (2003: 13):

Perhaps it is not too late...
And I must borrow every changing shape.
To find expression...dance, dance.
Like a dancing bear.¹²

Overall, however, his initial foray into publishing was a reaction to what Fox perceived to be the culturally corrosive and spiritually deficient nature of American society in the early 1970s. Fox advocated a return to mysticism and a radical prayer life that opens an individual's awareness of mystery and encourages a rejection of and a freedom from the 'ought and must not' culture imposed by society. This radical way of life savours God's Creation, rejects all form of injustice while promoting the participation in sensual endeavours and art as a healthy spiritual exercise. Fox's observes 'if the world were merely seductive, that would be easy and if it were merely challenging, that would be no problem, but I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (or savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day'¹³ (1972: 97).

¹² Eliot gives us an insight into the upper class society of the time as something rather empty and forlorn but the main focus is on the speaker who is depicted as soulless, empty, callous and unfeeling.

¹³ Attributed to E.B. White.

His second book *Whee We, Wee All the Way Home* was published in 1976, and this continued his previous theme in that it celebrated the sensual, spiritual and ecstasy that encountered God as a verb which leads to interdependence, compassion and justice. Other people's joy is our joy and their pain our pain. Fox argues that the hostility of Augustine's fall/redemption spirituality to the sensual hinders the development of compassion, and this defensive posture hardens the heart against both neighbour and creation (1976: 67). Thus, in accord with much of the New Age thinking of the time (e.g. Spangler, 1977), Fox promotes a post-Piscean, proto-Aquarian spirituality that celebrates the enjoyment of nature, while focusing on his theories of art as a meditation, societal problems, unemployment, poverty, the distribution of wealth, and the immorality of a capitalist system (1976: 14, 25) friendship, sex, sports and the tactical ecstasies of chanting, fasting, drugs, drink, celibacy, yoga and a path that was the Middle Way of the Jewish prophets, Jesus, Buddha, and St. Francis Assisi (1976: 45–73). In the second section, 'We', God is the Artist, not Master (1976: 123). It addresses the collective communal nature of spirituality in a panentheistic 'we-ness' and 'us-ness', rather than the traditional isolated monotheism, which celebrates memory, pleasure, symbolic play and thought rather than nostalgia, asceticism and literal thinking (1976: 73–130). Part III, the 'wee' section is about smallness, humility and our approach to spirituality and our personal journeys while highlighting the danger of the 'dragons' that hinder those journeys (1976: 130–78).

Fox's third book, *A Spirituality Named Compassion and the Healing of the Global Village: Humpty Dumpty and Us* (1979), continues to develop the theme of compassion, while also embracing Fox's eco-spirituality, peacemaking and interdependence. In particular, in focussing on compassion, this book he seeks to marry mysticism to social justice. Compassion, Fox argues, is a way of living and walking through life. It is spiritual rather than ethical in that it embraces life, empathizes with the pain of others and thus heals the wound of dualism, in that it refuses to 'separate love of God from love of neighbour and experiences both at once' (1979: 31). While this book is also a response to Chenu, it is foundational to understanding Fox's later writing on the Cosmic Christ and liberation theology. Eventually, all these ideas, embryonically evident in this volume, are developed and become central to his curriculum at ICCS. While, of course, one can always criticize

Fox's ecclcticism, judged more positively, Fox avoids the narrow procrustean bed of other spiritual writers, looks for wisdom wherever it might be found, and concludes that the calling to mysticism (the enjoyment of life) and prophecy (the fight to share life) are the components of a more adult spirituality. This is intended to be a significant response to faith and the belief that life itself is a gift.

These three books, which build on each other, can be understood in terms of a trilogy. Together they articulate the foundations of his subsequent thought, foundations which are rooted in Roman Catholicism and particularly the teaching of Chenu. More specifically, this thesis argues that Chenu introduced a theology of work that Fox has developed and continued. Hence, I would argue that *The Reinvention of Work* (1995) should be included at this point. It expands on Chenu's original hypothesis and theology of work that Fox reevaluates in terms of a daily sacrament. (This analysis is developed later in this thesis.). In a similarly way in *Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh* (1999) Fox, drawing on Martin Buber and Jewish thought, sought to challenge the traditional Augustinian perception of good and evil, while arguing that goodness and sinfulness cannot be clearly distinguished. The book develops the practical mysticism that becomes a blueprint for social transformation. This, I have argued, is very clearly an extension of Chenu's thesis. While we will see in Chapter 2 that Chenu did not develop a harmartiology, *Sins of the Spirit* may be read as Fox's theological response to this omission.

What might be understood as Fox's second trilogy comprises of *Original Blessing* (1983), *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (1988) and *Creation Spirituality* (1991). These three books are key to unravelling his thinking. Building on Chenu's work, and his interpretation of that work in his previous trilogy, Fox now begins his own exposition of a creation-centred spirituality. Firstly, it should be noted that this is not intended to be a systematic theology. The definitions that Fox provides are intentionally fluid and open ended. Again, to some extent it is a 'negative theology', in that he defines creation spirituality by emphasizing what it is not. Finally, *Original Blessing* is the beginning of a gradual departure from traditional thought. It becomes the hub of his progressive theology. It becomes a manifesto for a mystical, ecologically theology, celebrating universal compassion and *theosis*, the divinization of all creatures and the cosmos (1983b: 3, 188, 277). Fox reframes traditional

thought and rejects Augustine's fall/redemption spirituality. This he perceives to be a correction to centuries of Western patriarchy and anthropocentrism. He organizes the book into four paths, which lie at the heart of his subsequent thought:

Path I: Befriending Creation—the Via Positiva that explores creation, activity, beauty and justice and panentheism—this is a theology of creation.

Path II: Befriending Darkness, Letting Go and Letting Be—the Via Negativa explores the state of nothingness, emptiness, silence, and the needs to let go and pain—this is a theology of the cross.

Path III: Befriending Creativity, Befriending our Divinity—the Via Creativa is a synergy of both the Positive and Negative paths, which engages with the creative flow the birthing of art, music, conversation and writing—this is a theology of resurrection.

Path IV: Befriending New Creation—Compassion, Celebration, Erotic Justice, the Via Transformativa addresses the compassion and justice needed in the universe. A liberation theology and the image of God in the world and at work in people everywhere—this is a theology of the Holy Spirit.

The second book in this trilogy *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (1988) is arguably the most complicated and difficult within Fox's writings in that, in a convoluted journey, it departs from a traditional understanding of Christology. Fox attempts to rectify what he views as the unrestrained individualism and anti-cosmological prejudice of Western Theologies, while continuing to explore the concept of justice. Fox sought to expose the exploitation of the poor by the rich, while changing the way humanity relates to the world in the light of the current ecological and environmental disaster and the destruction of humanity. 'When a civilisation is without cosmology' he argues, 'it is not only cosmically violent, but cosmically lonely and depressed' and he calls for a new cosmology; that is built on modern science and the mystical awareness of the interconnectedness of all things (1988: 2).

It was at this juncture in 1987/1988 that the Vatican intervened in the form of Cardinal Ratzinger, who was the president of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the agency that was responsible for defending and reaffirming official

Catholic doctrine. Ratzinger concluded that Fox's writing 'has to be considered dangerous and deviant. It is not in touch with authentic Christian Spirituality and consequently is far from the official teachings of the church' (Meikle, 1985: 13).

Not only has Father Fox not ceased to promote his unbalanced notions of original blessing, he is engaged to present them to audiences all over the U.S. and beyond. . . . [N]ew personages have been added to the faculty of his Institute which call ever more into question its Catholic character. (Ratzinger, 1988: 25)

Fox was silenced. However, that silencing by Ratzinger promoted the sale of Fox's next book *Creation Spirituality* (1991) an inquiry into the relationship between spirituality and social justice and a liberation theology for North America and First World peoples. Freed from the confining shackles of the Vatican and inspired by Leonard Boff, Fox unleashed his reaction. The Catholic Church, he declared, was irrelevant and impotent in the face of the true suffering and degradation of the world (1991: 74, 120).

Over the years Fox has presented us with his interpretation of those he considers to be creation-centred mystics. These thinkers prove the centrality of his hypothesis for true, relevant Christian spirituality. The key texts in this respect are: *Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honouring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart* (originally published in 1980 as *Breakthrough*); 'Meister Eckhart on the Fourfold Path of a Creation-Centered Spiritual Journey', in *Western Spirituality* (1979); 'Meister Eckhart and Karl Marx: The Mystic as Political Theologian', in *Understanding Mysticism* (1980); *Meditations with Meister Eckhart* (1983); 'Creation-Centered Spirituality from Hildegard of Bingen to Julian of Norwich: 300 Years of an Ecological Spirituality in the West', in *Cry of the Environment* (1984); *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (1985); *Sheer Joy: Conversations on Creation Spirituality with Thomas Aquinas* (1992).

In *Passion for Creation*, Fox focuses on Eckhart's discussions of the following: the experience of God in creation; the experience of God in letting go and letting be; the experience of God in breakthrough and giving birth to self and God; and the experience of God in compassion and social justice. He also discusses the importance

of blessing, celebration, panentheism, mystery, spiritual maturity, and what it means to be a child of God. This tome is supplemented by a chapter in *Western Spirituality* (edited by Fox) in which he explores creation spirituality through the lens of Eckhart's thought. Indeed, in *Understanding Mysticism*, he provides a Marxist interpretation of Eckhart's spirituality. Finally, he has produced a small, introductory book of simple *Meditations with Meister Eckhart* (1984).

The *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (1985) and a chapter in *Cry of the Environment* (1984) examine what he describes as Hildegard's creation-centred, earth-based Celtic spirituality, art, music, writing, and scientific studies (this approach to Hildegard is discussed in Chapter 3 below). Additionally, with reference to Hildegard, in 'A Mystical Cosmology: Toward a Postmodern Spirituality', in *Sacred Interconnections* (1990), Fox presents a new perspective on art as meditation within a postmodern culture. Meanwhile *Sheer Joy*, written as a dialogue with Aquinas, provides a new interpretation of Aquinas' thought.

Clearly, what Fox presents us with are not historically accurate analyses of the figures. Rather they are, put bluntly, mouthpieces for Fox. As Constant Mew argues of his work on Hildegard,

My suspicion is that Fox wishes to displace the rational completely. While I do not doubt that many people may find his message inspirational, I would suggest that the ideal of developing a 'creation-centered mysticism' is inadequate to understand Hildegard. I would also suggest that the concept of 'creation' can impede the development of a fully ecological world view. A good deal of Hildegard's writing is concerned not with creation, but with moral behaviour, the character of Ecclesia and the meaning of scripture. She would not have thought of her thought as anything other than God-centered. (Mews, 2000: 1–14)

Fox has written three books in collaboration with others. The first was *Manifesto for a Global Civilization* (1982) with Brian Swimme, which explores the connection between Christian spirituality and the universe.

Clearly influenced by Chenu's interest in science,¹⁴ the two books that Fox co-authored with Rupert Sheldrake, *The Physics of Angels* (1996) and *Natural Grace* (1997), develop his own scientific thought. *The Physics of Angels* is a synthesis and examination of scientific and spiritual ideas that utilizes quotations from Christian mystics and reflections from modern science. Again, as with *Sheer Joy*, these are presented in the form of a dialogue to which the authors respond. *Natural Grace*, in the same way, examines the fusion of science and spirituality by means of Sheldrake's theory of morphic resonance. Again, these are good examples of the development of Fox's thought, in that, as with much New Age thought, he seeking to articulate a spiritual metanarrative, a unifying theory of everything.

Of his other publication, there are perhaps six more books that deserve mention. The first three deal with postmodern spirituality, deep ecumenism and creativity and, I would argue, while supporting Fox's hypothesis, they stand alone as separate excurses. In *Wrestling with the Prophets* (1995), the reader is presented with essays on AIDS, homosexuality, feminism, environmentalism, and mysticism. Fox equates an 'emergent postmodern spirituality' with a premodern understanding of humanity's relationship to the natural and supernatural realms, noting a direct connection between creation spirituality and the prophetic calling to interfere with injustice and wrong-doing' (Cormuss, 2006: 61) in a mythical debate with some of history's greatest mystics, philosophers and prophets.

One River Many Wells: Wisdom Springing from Global Faiths (2001) explores a deep ecumenism and claims to distil the principles of the world's religions, while arguing that all faiths are united by a common goal. 'There is one underground river,' Fox writes, 'but many wells into that river: an African well, a Taoist well, a Buddhist well, a Muslim well, a goddess well, a Christian well.' To go down a well is to practice a tradition, but 'we would make a grave mistake,' he believes, 'an idolatrous one, to confuse the well itself with the flowing waters' (2001: 6).

Creativity: Where the Divine and the Human Meet (2002) is small book which really does not plough any new ground and could be read in conjunction with most of Fox's books. However, having said that, it does provide an example of his eclectic

¹⁴ See Chenu *Is Theology a Science?* (1959), while he also engages with Aquinas' interest in science in *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century* (1968).

methodology. It consists of examples wisdom from various religions and philosophies, with Christian language and theology used to organize what he retrieves. The themes his gleanings from the world religions are organized into are (a) creativity, (b) ecological and spiritual crisis, (c) praise, joy and union with the universe, as opposed to addiction, consumerism and destruction.

A New Reformation: Creation Spirituality and the Transformation of Christianity (2006), a departure from Fox's usual style, is effectively a summary of Fox's perennial call for the rehabilitation of Western Spirituality. Essentially, Fox offers a summation of creation spirituality and emulates Luther by symbolically nailing his thesis to the door Castle Church in Wittenberg. In other words, he challenges the Church. *The Hidden Spirituality of Men* (2008) is also a departure from Fox's usual style and urges men to connect with their spiritual side, the 'divine masculine' that has been hidden or suppressed. Fox examines the body, sexuality, creativity and fatherhood, and the archetypal images that guided our ancestors. This book, very clearly betrays Fox's connection with Robert Bly's *Iron John* and the mythopoetic movement.

Finally, *Confessions: The Making of a Post-Denominational Priest* (1997) is Fox's autobiography, which traces his journey from Wisconsin to his well-earned reputation as a maverick: unorthodox and independent it provides his view of why he has become a thorn in the Vatican's side and has been denounced as a 'dangerous radical, heretic and blasphemer' (Brown and Novick, 1993: n.p.). However, as I have noted previously (p. 13) I recognize the inherent danger in entrusting any single authority. This autobiography, is factually interesting and accurate, even if Fox displays a tendency to portray himself as a 'persecuted genius, suppressed by a monolithic church' (LeBlanc, 1997: 51) that is intent on controlling his literary insight. Nonetheless, his narrative 'gives way to a more self-righteous tone as he becomes immersed in creation-centered spirituality' (LeBlanc, 1997: 51). Coupled with this is his tendency to dismiss all who embody orthodox Roman Catholicism or traditional beliefs contemptuously as 'repressed' or 'uninformed' (1997: 51 see also Fox, 1997a: 222). Nevertheless, the autobiographical factual insight was valuable given that there are no biographical studies available.

7. Conclusion

In his autobiography, Fox has chronicled his life story from his Catholic upbringing in Wisconsin, his seminary studies, his time in Paris, the imposed year of silence, to his expulsion from the Catholic Church and admission into the Anglican Order. According to Fox, he has emerged as a phoenix from the ashes, a visionary panentheistic theologian interested in liturgical ritual with a ministry to urban youth. We have seen from Mabry's statement and Fox's testimony that Chenu inspired his developing theology and creation-centred spirituality. However, previous analyses of Fox's theology have ignored this influence. Hence, what follows is a discussion of Chenu to determine the level of continuity between the two theologians.

However, to place Chenu's philosophy and the development of French Catholic theologies in context, I will survey the historical circumstances that preceded the impact that Chenu, among others, made within the French Catholic Church. I will then explore Chenu's theology, focusing mainly on his involvement with the worker-priest movement, his analysis of Augustine and dualism, and his theology of incarnation. I will also highlight significant areas of continuity with Fox's theology. I will then appraise Fox's proclivity towards Judaism relative to *Tikkun*, a Jewish periodical and Otto Rank's philosophy and finally, I will examine the influence of Bly and his poem *Iron John*.

Chapter 2

The External Influences on Matthew Fox's Creation Spirituality

1. Introduction

'Choices are the hinges of destiny' (Cook, 2007: 407) and in *Confessions*, his autobiography, Matthew Fox details the choices he made and his subsequent journey via childhood, the protracted struggle with the Vatican to his admission as a priest within the Episcopal Church. Fox is a good narrator but the book, while enjoyable, also settles old grievances (LeBlanc, 1997: 51). No person's life is completely determined by internal or external influences nonetheless, Fox's nurturing and subsequent Dominican training have clearly had some bearing on the way he perceives the world.

This chapter focuses primarily on Marie Dominic Chenu, the progressive Dominican, who we will argue, has influenced Fox's thought. Nonetheless, a brief overview of the French Catholic Church precedes the section on Chenu, since the *ressourcement* movement and the earlier history of France and French Catholicism, impacted on Chenu and the theological milieu of the twentieth century. Following this, because of Fox's Jewish connections and his predilection towards the Hebrew Scriptures, we will turn our attention to his interest in Rabbinic thought relative to Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel and Otto Rank. In addition we will examine the interfaith *Tikkun* Magazine edited by Rabbi Michael Lerner, which critiques politics, culture and society. Finally, we will examine Robert Bly the American poet, author, activist and leader of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement and his book *Iron John*.

2. The French Revolution and the Catholic Church

By the dawning of 1789, France was a society racked by cataclysmic political and social upheaval. Many complex issues provoked the crisis and they produced an equal number of complex consequences, which were fuelled by the indecisiveness of Louis XVI, the French nobility, clergy and government in the face of economic and political issues, coupled with the extortionate taxes that impoverished both peasants and workers. Meanwhile, the guiding principles of the Enlightenment and the

example of the American War of Independence informed the rebellion. The revolution abolished the monarchy, feudal privileges and serfdom while establishing equality in taxation reforming education and the law (Cragg, 1961: 289–84; see also Vidler, 1961: 11–21). The Catholic Church was engulfed in the conflagration that followed, and in this first section we will examine the pontificates of Pope Pius IX and Leo XIII who witnessed the separation of state and Church in France and their response to the crisis. We will then examine the impact of the Modernist movement, the worker priest movement and finally *Ressourcement*, the intellectual and spiritual movement that arose within the Catholic community, in response to the prevailing secularism.

(a) Liberty, Equality and Fraternity

The French Revolution (1789–1799), with its motto of ‘*Liberté, égalité, fraternité, ou la mort*’, while it heralded the birth of egalitarianism, swept away the monarchy and unleashed a radical genie, which quickly descended into Maximilien Robespierre’s reign of terror. In the face of an atheistic republic, the Church was forced to undertake a radical restructuring. The revolution ended the influence of medieval Catholicism and this was arguably a pivotal event for the future modernist movement within the French Catholic Church. By 1830, Gilbert du Montier Lafayette had led the liberal revolt, which overthrew the Bourbon monarchy and France moved towards an even greater democratization. This anticlerical proletarian uprising, coupled with a widespread questioning of dogma and tradition and the announcement that Catholicism was no longer the state religion, unnerved Pope Pius IX who reluctantly had to accept the new regime (Vidler, 1961: 68–69; see also Kappeler, 2009: 16–17). Even so, the history of Catholicism in the nineteenth century is predominantly identified with the pontificates of two men, Pius IX (1792–1878) and his successor, Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903).

Liberalism and political reforms marked the first years of Pius’ reign, but, with the growing perception that the papacy was being attacked, his pontificate took on a siege mentality. Pius failed to read the ‘signs of the times’ and became a blinkered reactionary, an inflexible opponent of all liberalizing tendencies (Vidler, 1961: 150). In 1864, Pius issued his controversial edict *Syllabus of Errors* (1862) in which he condemned and declared war on various errors that for him characterized modernity.

These included the freedom of religion, the separation of Church and state, 'rationalism, indifferentism, socialism, communism, pantheism, freemasonry and the liberty of the press' and materialism (Vidler, 1961: 151; see also Kappeler, 2009: 16, 26). Nonetheless, while the Church was seeking to clarify its teaching, it fact rejected liberalism, science, democracy and tolerance and retreated from the modern world. This Papal intransigence, while strengthening the Church's authority, had adverse political consequences (Vidler, 1961: 151–52; see also Kappeler, 2009: 16).

Pius was intent on vindicating the stance he had taken in his *Syllabus of Errors* in condemning the wide range of positions associated with rationalism, liberalism and materialism. His reign reached its climax on the 29 June 1868 when Vatican I was convened to address the challenges posed by the modern world whiles at the same time discussing the 'inspiration of Scripture, papal infallibility and primacy' (Kappeler, 2009: 215; see also Tanner, 1869: n.d.). The council promulgated two doctrinal constitutions *Pastor Aeternus* (Vatican 1, 1870: n.p.), which was concerned with the authority of the Pope, and *Dei Filius* (Vatican Council, 1869–1870: n.p.), which was connected with faith, reason and their interrelations.

Pius now claimed jurisdictional primacy over the entire Church. He declared that God had invested him with the gift of infallibility, under certain conditions, relative to the teaching of faith and morals. This announcement, which promulgated the dogma of Papal Infallibility, resulted in a split and several European Catholics rejected the teaching and separated to form the Old Catholic Church in protest (Schaff, 1931: 193; see also Yarnold, 1997: 562; Webster, 1997: 209). However, Vatican 1 was abandoned abruptly because of the Franco-Prussian war and the council was 'postponed *sine die*' (Kappeler, 2009: 25).

Subsequent to the invasion of the Papal States it seemed that the Vatican's temporal powers were ending. In response, the Ultramontane group, who advocated supreme papal authority in matters of faith and discipline, denounced all who opposed them. Moreover, while originally one group, they split away from liberal Catholics (Kappeler, 2009: 25). Following Vatican 1 an ultra conservative secret antimodernist society arose, called the *Sodalitum pianum* (1909) or *Sapinière*. Their members, known as *Integrists*, concentrated on the links among doctrinal deviations, modernism, and Christian democracy. *Integrism* in its excessive zeal was in turn

censured by Pope Benedict XV in 1914 (Ratté, 1973–1974: 419–27; see also Kappeler, 2009: 26).

Leo XIII (1878–1903), was a very different man to Pius IX. He pursued a policy of conciliation with modern society and understood the world as it is. Despite being a scientist and analytical, doctrinally, he remained a disciplinarian and conservative. As a result, because of the climate that his policies generated, the Modernist movement arose once more in France. Alfred Loisy's call for the freedom of conscience and his use of biblical and historical criticism provoked the promulgation of *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) which affirmed the inerrancy of Scripture and traditional biblical criticism (Vidler, 1961: 182–83).

In 1897, Loisy, in response to Adolf von Harnack's *History of Dogma*, set out to refute the Liberal Protestant view of Christianity. However, Loisy's abandonment of 'biblical inerrancy, and the scholastic system of Christological and ecclesiastical orthodoxy' was vehemently condemned by Rome (Vidler, 1961: 182, 184–85). Eventually, George Tyrrel, who, like Loisy, emphasized a collective religious experience while rejecting the divine authorship of Scripture and traditional authority, was also condemned and his ideas were suppressed. Finally, in what can only be described as a 'reign of terror', Pope Pius X halted the growing inclination towards modern theology (Vidler, 1961: 188). Pius X's decree *Lamentably Sane* (1907a) condemned the 'errors' while his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907b) declared all modernist teachings to be heretical, and by 1910, the movement was all but extinct.¹

Nevertheless, the period from 1930 to 1950 witnessed a new spiritual drive that again grew out of the political upheavals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in France. This initiative began with the resistance movement in France in 1941, when the Dominican priest Jacques Loew, became a manual labourer, giving birth to the worker priest movement, in an attempt to re-Christianize France and overcome the prevailing indifference. Loew's example encouraged other priests who, disguised as workers, entered the French prisons and German concentration camps, living side-

¹ The papal condemnation of 1907 was followed by the excommunications, of Tyrrell and Loisy and the institution of an anti-modernist oath in 1910. The confrontational literature engendered by the Loisy affair was increased through the efforts of the *Integrists*.

by-side in fellowship with the proletariat (Horn and Gerard, 2001: 33–34, 124–29; see also Strassner, 2006: n.p.). ‘The Jesuit Father Henri Perrin writes about this, “we are anxious to take our place completely within our milieu, so that all workers regard us as their colleagues. With one word: Our aim is friendship”’ (1956: 41f.; see also Strassner, 2006: n.p.).

While the German university at Mainz had revived medieval neo-scholasticism, or neo-Thomism, around 1800, there was a further attempt to revive medieval Scholasticism in the late nineteenth century. The movement, while embracing the ideas of other scholars, such as Duns Scotus, Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson, was infused with modern concepts. Nonetheless, this attempt to relate Thomist and scholastic thought to contemporary socio-political and economic problems was impotent in the face of apathetic religious indifference and the increasing secularization within society. The result was the emergence of a ‘broad intellectual and spiritual movement’, which was rooted in French Catholicism and was led by the Jesuits at Fourvière and the Dominicans at Le Saulchoir (Lubac, 1998: i; see also Daley, 2005: 367; D’Ambrosio, 1991: n.p.).

(b) Ressourcement, Retrieval and Renewal

It could be argued that the current perspective of Catholic theology, both ecclesial and spiritual, is the result of the *ressourcement* movement, which was responding to two trends in the ossification of Catholic theology and Neo-Scholasticism (Murray, 1997: 272). However, the movement was eventually challenged by Maurice Blondel, 1861–1949 (Blondel, 1984), Pierre Rousselot, 1878–1915 (Rousselot, 1935), and Joseph Maréchal, 1878–1944 (Marechal, 1970; Kerr, 1997: 107; see also Blanchette, 2010: 162; Swindal and Gensler, 2005: 297, 312).

While inextricably intertwined, the first step to what became generally known as *aggiornamento* had to be *ressourcement* and by 1946, *ressourcement* was established as a force in Catholic theology. The ‘key to theology’s relevance to the present lay in the creative recovery of its past’ (D’Ambrosio, 1991: n.p.). Therefore, the initial aim was the rediscovery of patristic and medieval scholarship, by reverting to the study of pre-scholastic doctrine and theology in search of renewal and revival. While dialoguing with modern writers and questions related to science, philosophy, politics

and economics. The Church began to take social mission seriously and the laity was committed to work alongside the poor. Although its opponents scorned the New Theology, those involved were convinced that it had to address the Church's contemporary situation (Murray, 1997: 77; see also Kerr, 1997: 106–108).

Thus, in a hermeneutic of continuity, the *ressourcement* movement,² drawing on the theology of the previous generation was sustained by, among others, Henri de Lubac. Lubac, while not the forefather of the *Ressourcement* movement, was its most important exponent and central to the movement. His book *Catholicism* (1983) reflected on the social dimensions of Christian doctrine and this became a key text for *Ressourcement*. While Lubac was drawing anew from experience it was his associates in the 1940s—Jean Daniélou, Yves Congar, M D. Chenu, and others—who were responsible for the return to the sources that has had such a profound impact on late twentieth-century Christian thought (Wilken in Lubac, 1998: xii; see also Kerr, 1997: 106–108; Millbank, 1997: 77; Chenu, 1964: 151–55).

This 'preconciliar period' was noted for the intense controversy that surrounded the modernist movement and its denunciation by the magisterium, a situation that continued until the acceptance of 'experience' during the Second Vatican Council (D'Ambrosio, 1991: n.p.). However, while Pius XII condemned the New Theologians, his encyclical *Humani Generis* also declared that in future, whenever the pope addressed controversial new issues, it could no longer be a matter for free debate among theologians:

disagreement and error among men on moral and religious matters, have always been a cause of profound sorrow to all good men, but above all to the true and loyal sons of the Church, especially today, when we see the principles of Christian culture being attacked on all sides. (Pius XII, 1950)

Humani Generis was an injunction against the adoption of new ideas and contemporary biblical texts without reference to the traditions of the Church (Kerr,

² *Ressourcement* drew some of its inspiration from earlier theologians and philosophers such as Johann. Möhler, John H. Newman, Ambroise Gardeil, Pierre Rousselot, and Maurice Blondel, but it also owed a great deal to the French Catholic poets Charles Péguy and Paul Claudel (D'Ambrosio, 1991: n.p.).

1997: 107). This austere, aloof and autocratic pontiff had come to epitomize the Papacy: it was assumed that all ‘popes were supposed to be...aristocratic in bearing and just this side of divine’ (McBrien, 1999: n.p.).³ Matthew Fox, as a catechumen and an impressionable adolescent, was moulded during his formative years in this conservative milieu. Thus, Pius’s death in 1958, the historical context of the French Catholic Church, the confrontation that the intelligentsia engaged in, and the ensuing, intoxicating sense of freedom produced repercussions that affected the whole Church, including those within the novitiate. It set in motion factions that would change society and the Church irrevocably.

The wind of change that blew briefly through the Vatican prepared the way for Vatican II, a watershed, which sought to involve the laity at a deeper level, while reforming the Church and its practices. Following our discussion of the French Catholic Church we turn our attention to Chenu, a key figure in the revitalization of Catholic theology between the two World Wars. We will examine Chenu’s systematic theology especially relative to his doctrine of co-creation that dominated the theology of work, his evaluation of Augustinian Dualism and Contemplation and finally his Christology and theology of incarnation by which God acts within, and on behalf of creation in relation to Fox’s thought. We will explore and develop the thought that Fox’s decision to engage in study at the Institute Catholique de Paris with Chenu at this time was central to understanding the future course of his theology.

3. The Significance of Chenu’s Thought in Relation to Matthew Fox

Marie-Dominique Chenu, born in 1895, was a prominent theologian in the intellectual renaissance that affected twentieth-century Catholic philosophy. A French systematic theologian, he specialized in Thomist thought, the nascent discipline of medieval studies and the history of the twelfth century, which he dubbed ‘the evangelical dawn’ and he was the founder of the reformist journal *Concilium* (Chenu, 1968: 239–69). Nonetheless, Elaine Burke-Sullivan observes that Chenu remains elusive, since there is very little of his work translated into English.

³ Catholics born after 1970 have only known John Paul II so this generation’s idea of how a pope should look and act is determined by the current pope, as it was for those born between 1930 and 1950 (McBrien, 1999, n.p.).

However, what is available is of interest to ‘theologians who are interested in the important links between *doxis* and *praxis*, or among systematics, spirituality and ethics’ (2003: 142–44).

(a) The Setting for Chenu’s Theology

In 1920, Chenu completed his doctoral dissertation, ‘A Psychological and Theological Analysis of Contemplation’,⁴ which examined Aquinas’s dialogue with theology, contemplation and socio-economic developments. This thesis, intended as a work of *ressourcement*, articulated much of Chenu’s mature theology, especially in relation to the ‘rejection of dualisms that destroy the integral character of the human person’ (Conticello, 1920: 365, in Potworowski, 2001: 6). Thus, Chenu integrated reflection on medieval sources with an analysis of the current condition of the Church, while anchoring the entire undertaking in a contemplative experience (Potworowski, 2001: 5–6; see also Boersma, 2009: 136).

Chenu’s thesis was also a riposte to certain philosophical positions taken in a theological debate involving the correlation between ‘knowledge and mysticism’ and the scrutiny of religious experience. The argument stemmed from Immanuel Kant’s (1787) proposition in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. This critique was Kant’s opus on epistemology and metaphysics, in which he responded to David Hume’s empiricism by insisting that the human mind cannot corroborate, neither repudiate, nor demonstrate scientifically the ultimate nature of reality. Finally, as Chenu himself admitted, he was also intent on anchoring the doctrine of contemplation within Aquinas’s intellectualism (Potworowski, 2001: 6–8; see also Boersma, 2009: 136).

In his analysis of Thomas Aquinas, Chenu expounds on the interaction between contemplation and praxis within Aquinas’s profoundly ethical and scripturally based theology. He depicts Aquinas as an intellectual giant, a contemplative whose commitment to poverty manifested a concern with social justice, which was superior to any form of isolating asceticism that insulated the contemplative from the human

⁴ This thesis has only recently been rediscovered and a partial edition was provided by Carmelo Guiseppe Conticello, 1920, ‘De contemplatione’ (Angelicom), *La thèse inédite de doctorat du P. M.-D. Chenu*, RSPT 75 (1991), 363–422. The complete manuscript is located in the Dominican archives’s in Paris (Potworowski, 2001: 6). From now on each reference to Chenu’s dissertation will be as follows: Conticello, 1920: plus a number.

condition. Contemplation for Aquinas became a moral virtue that was rooted in his systematic theology and his pastoral preaching (2002: 21, 36–38, 52).

Christopher Potworowski's analysis of Chenu's published and unpublished material⁵ discusses some of Chenu's mature ideas and theology in the crucial period that led up to the second Vatican Council. Analysing dualism, the role of contemplation and the continued incarnation in Chenu's thinking, Potworowski proposes that Chenu's theology was primarily anchored in his Dominican vocation and its contemplative heart. This, he asserts, is the key to Chenu's thinking and his theology of work which we will examine next.

(b) *Chenu and Fox's Nouvelle Théologie*

Chenu, in *La Doctrine sociale de l'Eglise comme idéologie*, his review of social doctrine, recognized that the Church's attempt to sanctify the individual, while ignoring the individual's social structure of existence, was doomed to failure. It was incompatible with the basic laws of the Christian economy since the fact that each individual is compelled to function within a social dimension is immutable. Moreover, because the Church failed to engage it was faced with an unevangelized populace rather than a de-Christianized flock. The Church was forced to recognize its own immaterial state before it could re-evaluate and interpret the situation (Chenu, 1979; see also Goergen, 1983: 155–69).

Indeed, the contemporaneous growth of an atheist socialist movement was fuelled by the workers' perception that the Church was a defensive ghetto, and this viewpoint fostered an indefensible gulf between the proletariat's experience of the world of work and any belief system or faith. Following Aquinas, Chenu combined his own radical theology with the dialogue between Christian theology and Marxist thought, the prevailing socio-economic position and new initiatives, as demonstrated in the French worker-priests' theology of work (Chenu, 1975: 61; see also Potworowski,

⁵ Potworowski, having done his MA thesis on Origen's scriptural interpretation continued his doctoral studies with a dissertation on Chenu's theology. Potworowski said he 'bumped into Chenu almost by accident' in the Dominican Archives in Paris where he was researching French theology, which he considers to be at the root of Catholic renewal. Following Chenu's death, Potworowski went to Paris and assisted with classifying Chenu's papers. Thus, he gained access to all of Chenu's unpublished material as well as his many publications. Potworowski's book includes a complete bibliography of Chenu's writings and is unavailable elsewhere and, according to Ramon Gonzalez, this is now regarded as a comprehensive analysis of Chenu's thinking (2002).

2001: 122, 136–37). Apparently, Chenu joked that, ‘people would sometimes think there were two Chenus, “one old medievalist, who does palaeography and a kind of scoundrel who just runs in the lines of fire of the holy Church”’ (Boersma, 2009: 134).

The *nouvelle théologie* movement of the 1940s and 50s, and the theologians involved, were foundational to the *magisterium*’s eventual emphasis on the doctrine of co-creation and the theology of work. Because he believed people transformed history into eternity through their work, Chenu argued,⁶ ‘Human beings cannot live outside communities; so building vibrant communities are their most fundamental apostolate. People must learn that the profound significance of human work is that it can realize God’s plan for the world within our social experience’ (Chenu, 1963; cf. 2002: vi).

Those who witnessed the progressive process of ‘dechristianization’ denied the fundamental change that the rise in technology had wrought in society. However, Chenu’s recognition of man as a ‘collaborator in creation’ led him to reject the traditional biblical images of the potter, blacksmith and peasant that had equipped older theologians. They were inadequate, in the face of a machine driven age, new technology and the ‘changeover from craft tool to machine’ (Chenu, 1963: 8–9, 23; see also D’Ambrosio, 1991: n.p.).

Chenu accepted the challenge of modernity and insisted that all human work and modern technology carried its own value. The current apostasy, he argued, did not stem from individual sin; it was a chain of causation that had led to a specific set of determinisms, which impacted on Christendom (Potworowski, 2001: 118, 127–29). Evidently, Chenu’s theology of work gave movement to the ‘doctrine of co-creation’ which influenced the scholarship of both Catholic and Protestant, traditions for the last half of the twentieth century (Hammond, Stevens and Svanoe, 2002: 54).

Incarnation, présence, engagement and adaptation became the new pastoral buzzwords (D’Ambrosio 1991: n.p.). Chenu criticized the fragmentation of theology,

⁶ See, J. Cardin, 1990, ‘Théologie du travail, théologie pour l’homme’, in *L’hommage différé au Père Chenu* (Paris: Cerf).

which set abstract thinking in tension with pastoral care and spirituality. He argued, that revealed data, ‘must be given primacy over rational constructs’ (D’Ambrosio, 1991: n.p.; see also Chenu in Draguet, 1936: 13–17). Moreover, because theology’s endless preoccupation with systematic theology has eroded its sense of mystery, it must once more be ‘centered in the history of salvation’ (Chenu in Draguet, 1936: 13–17; see also D’Ambrosio, 1991: n.p.). ‘Before all else, to be a theologian really means not to be cut off from the daily concrete life of the Church’ (Chenu, 1965: 141ff.; see also D’Ambrosio, 1991: n.p.).

Eventually, and often anonymously, in a basic expression of priesthood, the worker priests re-interpreted Catholic teaching and began to partake of the labour and hardship of the workers. While conventional theology attempted to attract people back to the traditional Church, the worker-priests talked of being ‘evangelised by the poor’ and ‘sharing in God’s preference for the little ones’ (Collins, 1995: 12). Consequently, Daniélou set out what was termed a ‘*manifesto of la nouvelle théologie*’,⁷ a theology that would build up the body of Christ and meet the challenges of the post-war situation (Daley, 2005: 362–79). While an emphasis on transcendence and the incomprehensible mystery of God became the distinctive feature of *ressourcement*, it was also a ‘re-centring in Christ’ and the Easter story. The undertaking was not intended to change or add anything to Christianity, but to go deeper into the faith they had received. As Lubac remarked, although Catholics, we must rediscover the gospel:

there is nothing that should be changed in it, nothing that should be corrected, nothing that should be added (which does not mean, however, that there is not a continual need to keep its channels from silting up); it is not a case of adapting it to the fashion of the day. It must come into its own again in our souls. We must give our souls back to it. (Lubac, 1963: 71–72)

⁷ The term ‘*la nouvelle théologie*’ is associated with Fourvière, the Jesuit *theologate* [sic] outside of Lyons, and it was coined by Msgr. Pietro Parente in his 1942 *Osservatore Romano* article attacking M.D. Chenu and Louis Charlier of *Le Saulchoir*. It was years later that the term was applied to the Lyons Jesuits by Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange (1946: 126–45).

Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that the worker-priests would have understood their calling to have emanated from divine grace under the impulse of the spirit.

Despite the thirty-year lapse in time, Matthew Fox's theology, while echoing the Catholic emphasis on co-creation and the theology of work, demonstrates a similar trend to Chenu's, albeit one couched in his own inimitable style and inclination. Basing his argument on Matthew 25:40 and affiliating with all underprivileged groups, Fox intersperses the expression 'little ones' with the term the '*anawim*'. However, while he also defines the *anawim* as those who are disadvantaged and discriminated against within society, he expands and diversifies the vision to include 'third world people, blacks, feminists, homosexuals and the handicapped' (1983b: 11).

As Collins records, the worker-priests talked of being 'evangelised by the poor' [*anawim*] (1995: 12). However, in Fox's exegesis the *anawim*, have become an 'authentic source of revelation' and our 'primary spiritual directors', in that they point us towards the hidden kingdom-queendom of God. This is a call to *metanoia* and a change in heart and lifestyle (1983b: 270). Creation spirituality, according to Fox, was the tradition of the *anawim* in contrast to the 'empire building' aspirations of traditional Christianity (Fox in Turner, 1995: 16). In an attempt to retrieve an unadulterated gospel, Fox argues that none of us is truly *anawim*. None of us is separated from God, but we are blessed and loved by God. He suggests that 'to listen to the *anawim*, to the so called weaker peoples of the earth, requires that we let go of oppressive spiritualities that appeal to right-wing ideologies' (1983b: 267–70).

Fox defines the finite human quality of compassion, which he endows with the attributes of transcendence and contemplation, as the consummation of the spiritual life, the realized eschatology that will birth the Cosmic Christ. Compassion itself becomes a means of grace; the very act of reaching out to broken humanity becomes an act of worship and co-operation with God. Compassion, combined with justice, he argues, leads us to Christ's promise in John 17:21, 'that all might be one, Father, even as I am one in you and you are one in me...a oneness of compassion' (1999a: 32). While the 'virtue of compassion' as a concept is to be found in both the Old and New Testaments, as the work-priest demonstrated, it entails empathizing and entering another's pain.

While classical theology denied God's ability to suffer H. M. Relton argued, 'there are many 'indications that the doctrine of the suffering God is going to play a very prominent part in the theology of the age in which we live' (1960: 79). Theologians from various disciplines, such as A. N. Whitehead, who understood God as 'the fellow-sufferer who understands' (Williams in Meland, 1969: 175–94), Emil Brunner (1949: 268, 294), Karl Barth (Jungel, 1976: 83–88), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1953) and especially Jürgen Moltmann in *The Crucified God* began to emphasise a doctrine of divine suffering (Bauckham: 1984: 6–12).

Jürgen Moltmann apprehends and interprets the theology of the cross and the resurrection of Christ as dialectical love and suffering: God's commonality with the suffering of the world in the suffering of Christ (Moltmann, 1974: 46–47, 60, 190; see also Bauckham, 1997: 209–24). Moltmann's major contribution was the concept that, 'God's being is in suffering and the suffering is in God's being itself, because God is love...[people] can open themselves to suffering and to love...with the pathos of God' (1974: 227, 303).

Having rejected a Fall-redemption theology Fox has bypassed the cross as the means of reconciliation. However, 'the death of Jesus on the cross was meant to be the last instance of human violence toward the beauty of creation and toward justice-making, compassionate persons' (1983b: 301). The *Via Negativa* seeks to show that there is a place for a new spirituality of 'emptying, kenosis, even a theology of the cross as a symbol of "letting go"' (1983b: 134–47). Nonetheless, 'courage, not comfort, is the key to a Christian way, and it is this that the cross signifies in a creation-centered spirituality' (1978a: 731–36). To a great extent, while there is much to separate Fox and Moltmann, Fox would be in sympathy with the trajectory of such a *theologia crucis*.

Having said that, as far as Fox is concerned, and as Jane Strohl notes, he readily offers himself as an advocate for all estranged and 'dispossessed' Catholics (1988: 42–47). Nevertheless, the alternative Christianity offered by Fox is imbued with current thinking. Consequently, it is 'worldly and confident of the superiority of post-Enlightenment categories', and his rationale becomes incomprehensible and ambiguous (Boulton, 1990: 428–32). Unlike Moltmann, Fox's argument for a

doctrine of compassion flows from a humanistic perspective, in the sense that Fox overemphasizes the potential value and goodness inherent within humanity.

Unlike in Moltmann's theology, Faludi argues that secular society sees no value in suffering and endeavours to eradicate pain, as evidenced in our current culture of individualistic and holistic therapy (2004: 1, 22). Nevertheless, while compassion is not a new virtue, if it is theorized in terms of humanistic values, it cultivates the misconception that humanity may be relieved of all human suffering. This is 'neither realistic nor rooted in love...when compassion becomes a principle, it ceases to be a virtue' (Demarco, 1996: 34–41).

While the worker-priests laboured alongside the people, Fox argued for a new philosophy of work. Fox exhorts humanity to abandon its outmoded industrial-age models of work that have despoiled the Earth, for the precepts of a new cosmology. This, he maintains, will amalgamate 'science, spirituality and a sense of the sacred' into education, business, politics and Christianity. Work becomes the 'metaphor and symbol' for what we value most, a creative expression of the Spirit at work in the world through us. Nevertheless, as 'compassion' becomes infused with the quality of 'transcendence', work now becomes a 'sacrament within the ongoing sacrament of the universe...that we bestow on one another' (Fox, 1995a: 1, 116, 224–29).

While he utilizes Aquinas's phrase 'to live well is to work well' to develop his own concept of *homo artifex* within his new spiritual paradigm, the four paths of creation spirituality culminated in the *Via Creativa*. Hence, humanity divinity and creativity, to contribute to the compassion and justice needed in society with creative, effectual and healing work. The *Via Creativa* becomes the gateway for our 'generative' abilities, our imagination and our ability to co-create. Our current 'worldview' is that of the industrial revolution, where financial affairs and technology dominate and those with artistic orientations are frequently oppressed and affronted. The world calls for *metanoia*—a change of heart and a new definition of work, that will value the contribution of the artisan and mystic (Fox, 1991a: 25). Indeed, unemployment will cease to be a problem, when the paradigm shift to a creation spirituality reinstates the marginalized artisans to centre-stage (Croucher, 2003: n.p.).

Finally, Fox argues that humankind, having emerged from childhood into the enlightenment of adolescence, is now on the brink of creative maturity. They are called to birth and share their images and creations of beauty and surprise. Quoting Eckhart, he declares, ‘We are heirs of the fearful creative power of God’ (1983b: 181–82):

But the spirit of God who wants creation to thrive is with us. The kingdom/queendom of God is among us; and it is a kingdom not just of words but of power. The New Creation will be God’s work *and* our work. We will truly be co-creators in this process of transformation. (Fox, 1983b: 256)

We will return to Chenu and Fox’s theology of work in connection with their understanding of continued incarnation, cosmic incarnation and global justice in Chapter 5. However, in the next section we will evaluate their understanding of *Aquinas, Augustinian Dualism and Contemplation*.

(c) Chenu and Fox in Relation to Aquinas, Augustinian Dualism and Contemplation

Fox rejects Augustine, ‘he is not my favorite theologian’ he declares, while denouncing Augustine as a ‘philosopher of dualism’ and the ‘theologian of original sin’ (1997a: 1). Nonetheless, he concedes that Augustine was a psychological genius.

Seven centuries ago Aquinas, in an age that venerated Augustine as an authority, broke with him on key issues of spirituality such as matter, time, women, history and the importance of the natural sciences. Perhaps if more persons knew this fact, they would feel freer to go beyond Augustine. And, one hopes, beyond Aquinas. (Fox, 1978a: 731–36)

Nonetheless, even though Augustine failed to solve the West’s spiritual problems, a creation-centred mysticism, in Fox’s opinion, would offer a ‘less dualistic, less anthropocentric religious paradigm’ (1997a: 1; cf. 1988a: 80). Chenu argued that the desacralization of Western society was due to the pervading influence of Augustine.

It is worth noting here that Aquinas in his *Summa*,⁸ argued that whenever Augustine,⁹ ‘who was imbued with the doctrines of the Platonists found in their teaching anything consistent with faith, he adopted it; and those things which he found contrary to faith he amended’ (Aquinas, 1974: 782).

I note this because Chenu argues that, for Aquinas, theology was the wisdom among the sciences. However, at times in the *Summa*, he had to fall back on categories borrowed from Greek philosophy, which Augustine had already used, but in a very different way:

For Augustine wisdom (with its supreme divine object and its unique method,) diminished the human sciences, which he saw as condemned to fragile and passing interests. Yet St. Thomas allots to these sciences their full dignity and their autonomous methodology. Within his system, they promise rational certitude according to the pursuit of the proper formal object of each science. (Chenu, 2002: 32–33)

The point is that, for Chenu, Augustine’s theology, was susceptible to latent Platonism, that eventually influenced other theologians and spiritual writers who began to think of the ‘union of soul and body’ as the precursor of an ‘independent substantial soul’. The soul’s union with matter is incidental and the temporal body destined to escape time. Augustine’s brilliance overcame many of the problems inherent in this type of spirituality. Unfortunately, the system that inherited his name, Augustinianism, held on tenaciously to all the ‘consequences’ implied in this thinking (Chenu, 2002: 92). From his analysis of Aquinas, evidently Chenu regards him as the most important of the scholastic theologians who significantly changed the belief system of the Catholic Church (2002: 89–90).

Thus, in a similar way to Aquinas, Chenu’s main argument with Augustine concerned dualism, especially where it impacted on his own theology of contemplation and incarnation. Aquinas broadened theological education within the Dominican order through his study of Aristotelian philosophy and its concern with

⁸ *Prima Pars*, Q 84, A 5, Ob.3.

⁹ See *De Doctr. Christ.* ii, 11.

matter. This provided him with the intellectual foundation for his theology of the goodness of creation and the rejection of dualism (Potworowski, 2001: 9–10). Consequently, he duly rejected the prevailing twelfth-century Augustinianism, which differentiated between the ‘speculative and scientific function of the intellect qualified for the knowledge of earthly realities and the faculty of wisdom...and love qualified for the knowledge of divine and eternal realities’ (Conticello, 1920: 403, in Potworowski, 2001: 9–10).

Theology, in recent decades, has acknowledged the ‘tension between the transcendent and the immanent’, while recognizing the danger of one-sided reductionism (Grenz and Olson, 1997: 311). Historically, the dominant dualism was perceived to be between the concrete and the abstract. Chenu, following Aquinas with his unified concept of body and soul and the dignity of matter, argued that, with the rejection of dualism, the ‘human being is thus in solidarity with the cosmos’ (Potworowski, 2001: 86–90).

The universe, then, is an admirably ordered unity. The integration—at once ontological and noetic—of all the beings it contains in its hierarchical order implies a ‘continuity’ that is at once dynamic and static in principle. (Chenu, 1968: 89)

Contemplation, in Chenu’s opinion, was a component of the experiential faith common to all believers, while incarnation was the potent bodily indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, Chenu’s dissertation on the nature of contemplation was built on the two ‘doctrinal positions of St Thomas, one psychological and the other theological’ (Conticello, 1920: 383, in Potworowski, 2001: 8). A distinction had to be made between our human intellect and reason. All knowledge is acquired via the senses, the medium through which the intelligible world is apprehended. However, while our subjective ‘human intellect’ governs our intuitions and powers of perception, our capacity for ‘human reasoning’, allows humanity to gain knowledge by our ability to analyse and theorize (Potworowski, 2001: 8).

Chenu views contemplation as an end in itself, our means of increasing our intimacy with God for which we were created:

This profound unity of contemplation and action in the exercise of apostolic life presupposes an orientation for contemplation different from that of a purely speculative thinker. At the heart of Christian contemplation we find not a love of pure ideas, but rather a love of God and of our brothers and sisters. The apostolic vocation arises directly out of a love troubled by others' needs. (2002: 46)

For Chenu 'human happiness is to be found in the act of wisdom, the summit of all virtues...[and] the gift of wisdom perfects the knowledge of faith' (Potworowski, 2001: 8–9). However, not all are agreed on how we perceive contemplation and wisdom as is demonstrated in the prevailing conflict between intellectualism and mysticism, and asceticism and mysticism (Potworowski, 2001: 9). While the latter dualism deems that contemplation is reserved for the spiritual elite, the inescapable lot of the uneducated laity was the quest for sanctification by means of virtuous abstinence (Potworowski, 2001: 9).

Chenu stresses the primacy of the unity between theology, faith and humanity's experience of God (2002: 28, 38). Contemplation is 'the simple intuition of truth' (Conticello, 1920: 393, in Potworowski, 2001: 11), distinct from the other functions of the intellect while, at the same time, preserving the holistic dimension of personhood (Potworowski, 2001: 9–11). He remarked, 'it is not only the soul that thinks, nor only the body that senses; it is the man who thinks, wills, loves, senses, acts, works. Body and soul are not real subjects each of which has in itself the capacity to be or to act in its own sphere, merely conditioned by the other' (Chenu, 1968: 49). This renunciation became the basis for Chenu's stance towards the 'unity of human reality in its relation to God' (Conticello, 1920: 383, in Potworowski 2001: 9). His unshakable trust in the reasonability of faith became an intrinsic part of his writing, particularly in relation to his distinctive vision of 'theology as science' that he published in a small treatise under the title of *Une École de Théologie: le Saulchoir* (Chenu, 1937).¹⁰

¹⁰ In 1928, Chenu became regent of studies at Le Saulchoir, the Dominican 'House of Studies' in Paris. However, during this time of theological renewal, in February 1942 his treatise was placed on the *Index librorum prohibitorum*-Index of Forbidden Books (Pius XII, 1948: n.p.). Thus, Chenu lost

Nevertheless, in ‘Structure of the Soul and Mystical Experience’, Chenu emphasized the danger and the tension between the practice of contemplation and praxis, in that the insulated contemplative may neglect the call to serve and redeem humanity (1960: 65–74). The ‘human condition’, he argued, cannot be imagined, comprehended or engaged with outside society. Chenu discovered that what he saw in the world somehow prompted him to contemplation. ‘The world and the Word of God should not’, Chenu insisted, ‘be separated. Our priority is to go out to the world. The world is the place where the Word of God takes on meaning’ (Chenu in Murray, 2001).

Augustine, Aquinas and Chenu have all, in turn, recognized the tension between the active and the contemplative life. While they all hypothesize that work predisposes humankind to contemplation as Aquinas records in his *Summa*, the ‘active life actually precedes the contemplative life’ (1920: II–II, q. 182, a. 4, ad 1).

In the 1990s there arose a serious dispute involving the status of Thomistic hermeneutics. Fox, because of the ongoing investigation regarding the ‘doctrinal purity’ of his work, had already been suspended. Ratzinger, who was the watchdog for correct interpretation was, without warning, confronted with *Sheer Joy*. Fox’s ‘narrative study’ offered in place of seven centuries of Thomistic hermeneutics (Slattery, 2006: 134–36). Aquinas was not a Thomist, Fox argues:

I descholasticize Aquinas by interviewing him. I...ask him our questions and allow him access to our pressing issues in spirituality. Following the inner logic of the biblical text, he, Aquinas, is free to make connections, let his creative genius work, and allow his heart as well as his head to speak. Here his passion often comes tumbling out — especially when he is speaking of his favorite love, wisdom. (1992a, p. 2–3)

In an attempt to recover this wisdom Fox’s interpretation offered a postmodern cosmology, which challenged ‘modernity and the absolute metanarrative of the Enlightenment’. Fox’s hermeneutics delighted some, while ruffling feathers in the

his position as regent of studies at Le Saulchoir, no reason was given but his work was probably judged to be too close to ideas labelled as ‘modernist’.

Vatican (Slattery, 2006: 134–36). Fox, in an incredible stratagem, gathered together fragments from Aquinas’ writings in *Sheer Joy* and formed the result into a dialogue with himself and Aquinas becomes an advocate for creation spirituality. In a post-modern hermeneutical approach Fox subjects Aquinas text to a ‘series of questions about each of the four paths of creation spirituality and answers them with quotations drawn from a wide range of Aquinas’ works’ (Osborn, 1995: n.p.). He denies Aquinas the right to speak for himself and, as Osborn has argued, ‘passages are taken out of context’ and offered as if they answer our questions. The author’s intentions are submerged in Fox’s emphasis on the reader’s response. In fact, almost any Christian theologian could be presented as part of the creation spirituality tradition in this way’ (1995: n.p.).

Meanwhile, Fox argued, ‘I believe Aquinas deserves—and we today require from Aquinas—a nonlinear celebration of his amazingly mystical *and* intellectual thought’ (Fox, 1992: 12). However, discerning the accuracy of Fox’s interpretation of Aquinas is not easy as these two examples will demonstrate. While Aquinas quotes and concurs with Augustine in his *Summa* he frequently distances himself from Augustinian concepts. Agreeing with ‘St. Augustine (II De doct. Christ., c. xl)’, Aquinas argues that ‘we may hold that whatever truths are discovered among the pagans should be adapted by peoples elsewhere’ (*Sum. Theol.*, I, Q. lxxxiv, a. 5). However, it seems that Aquinas did not totally follow Augustine’s theory of divine illumination the belief that the eternal truths are imparted to our soul by the Word of God. Hence he refuses to accept any proof a priori of the existence of God the arguments for the existence of God must be a posterior (Aquinas, *Sum. Theol.*, 1, 2, 1, and 1, 2, 2, in Weber, 1973: 83).

Sheer Joy is presented as a modern interpretation of Aquinas’ teaching however, if we attempt to find Fox’s commentary on the above quotes from the *Summa* (*Sum. Theol.*, I, Q. lxxxiv, a. 5 and 1, 2, 1, and 1, 2, 2), as mentioned above, we are immediately faced with a problem. While Fox provides footnotes to a selection of Aquinas’ text there is no index therefore it is virtually impossible to find an interpretation. Indeed, as we will see from the following examples each section follows the same pattern. Fox asks a question and Aquinas answers, for example, in a section on the *Via Positiva* we are presented with the following dialogue:

Fox: You hold creatures and the world in such divine esteem. Don't you ever get accused of pantheism?

AQUINAS: On the contrary, to hold creatures cheap is to slight divine power (CG III, ch. 69n. 15). Creatures resemble God, yet God does not resemble creatures (*Sum. Theol.*, I, q. 4, a. 3, ad 4; Fox, 1992a: 66–67).

Fox: To say 'creatures exist in God' sounds like panentheism.

AQUINAS: The Scriptures say, "of God, and by God, and in God are all things" (Rom. 11:36). God embraces in the divine self all creatures. God holds all things in Godself [sic] and not successively according to time nor divided into parts, but together. Indeed, the Godhead contains all things. God contains every place. God does not rest in some thing but all things rest in God. All things are in God since in the Godhead God has all being, all substance, and all existence; and again as around the Godhead insofar as they are derived from God. Christ says, 'Remain in me' by receiving grace; 'and I remain in you' by helping you.¹¹ (Fox, 1992a: 66–67)

Fox's footnotes offer two references CG III, ch. 69 n. 15 (*Summa Contra Gentiles*) which actually reads as follows:

Furthermore, the perfection of the effect demonstrates the perfection of the cause, for a greater power brings about a more perfect effect. But God is the most perfect agent. Therefore, things created by Him obtain perfection from Him. So, to detract from the perfection of creatures is to detract from the perfection of divine power. But, if no creature has any active role in the production of any effect, much is detracted from the perfection of the creature. Indeed, it is part of the fullness of perfection to be able to communicate to another being the perfection which one possesses. Therefore, this position detracts from the divine power.

He also offers a reference to *Sum. Theol.* I, q. 4, a. 3, ad 4, which reads:

¹¹ I have omitted Fox's references in this section.

Further, among like things there is mutual likeness; for like is like to like.
If therefore any creature is like God, God will be like some creature,
which is against what is said by Isaiah: 'To whom have you likened
God?' (Isaiah 40:18)

Fox is paraphrasing Aquinas nonetheless, his scholarship is convoluted and he is highly eclectic in what he selects. Eventually, Fox wrote *The Reinvention of Work* and quoting Aquinas, he argues, 'Aquinas said God is a "fountain of total beauty"' (1995a: 87). The problem being, that in his reference he points his reader to *Sheer Joy* (1992a:106), his own suspect interpretation. The overall result is that Fox produces an interpretation of Aquinas as an expert on creation spirituality rather than an accurate study and representation of Aquinas' theology.

Aquinas was ignored by his successors, dismissed by the Church, and finally obliterated during the Enlightenment period, has become one of the central protagonists for Fox's new creation spirituality (Fox, 1988a: 114). However, while echoing Chenu's theological reflection on Augustine, Fox has expanded and moved away from Chenu's closely defined parameters and his rejection of dualism. He is indebted to Chenu, but has not stayed with him. This is particularly evident in his Christology.

Like Chenu, Fox regards the traditional link between 'action and contemplation' as problematical in that Augustine's conclusion forced him to link 'wisdom with contemplation' and 'knowledge with action'. What is more, if contemplation and action are viewed as antithetical, it diminishes contemplation, which cannot then embody humanity's spiritual energy in its entirety. Inevitably, dualism 'split Nature from grace' and 'that dualism, that wound, has haunted Western religion for sixteen hundred years'. However, the utilization of Meister Eckhart's mysticism within creation spirituality 'heals what Augustine took apart' (Fox, 1983b: 251; cf. Fox and Sheldrake, 1997b: 53–54).

In an attempt to negate the perceived dualism that permeates the patriarchal Western view of reality, Fox turned his attention to the cosmos. As early as 1976, he held the belief that the dualistic Piscean Age of dichotomy would terminate at the end of the twentieth century. As humanity moved into the Age of Aquarius, the new paradigm

would awaken the world to the Cosmic Christ when ‘evil will be made conscious to every individual who may in turn be made truly spiritual and responsible’ (1981a: 31). Rejecting the anthropocentric Newtonian norm, he roots his new paradigm in Albert Einstein’s physics, which Fox claims will unite theology, science, mysticism and art. Andrew Basden, analysing dualism in Fox’s four paths of creation spirituality, has this to say:

Dualism is a set of presuppositions that underlie most of our thinking about God, ourselves and the nature of things—that reality comprises two ‘opposites’...it is not just a philosophical or theological nicety; it has effects in the real world, of work, politics, family life, church life and in the very vision of society...Fox’s concern in the *Via Positiva* was that we devalue God’s creation. What causes this is not the Fall-Redemption view but rather the Sacred side of Sacred-Secular dualism that says that ‘material’ creation is of no value to God, and should therefore be of no value to us. His concern in the *Via Negativa* is that we do not accept nothingness and suffering. What causes this is not the Fall-Redemption view but rather the desire for power, individuality, which is legitimised by the Form side of the Form-Matter dualism. His concern in the *Via Creativa* is that we do not realise our ‘divine potential’. This is brought about to some extent, not by the Fall-Redemption view (though it could be by the Fall-Only view) but by emphasizing the Determinism side of the Determinism-Freedom dualism: ‘human beings are no more than products of evolution’. His concern in the *Via Transformativa* is that we have little expectation of the creation being transformed. This is not the fault of a Fall-Redemption view but rather of a combination of all three dualisms. ‘Matter’ can never be transformed into the perfection of ‘Form’, ‘Secular’ can never be transformed into ‘Sacred’, ‘Determinism’ thinks only in terms of progress, not transformation,

and 'Freedom, especially in its existential guise, does not see any need for transformation. (Basden, 1994: n.p.)¹²

Since Fox has absorbed much of Chenu's thought and used it to articulate his own spirituality, it is tempting to think that he and Chenu hold much in common. That is to say, from what has been discussed thus far, it appears that they are both singing from the same hymn sheet.

(d) Chenu and Fox's Christology

At the incarnation, Christ took upon himself all that is human. This is a foundational teaching on which Chenu developed a sequence of theological formulas that place humanity's predicaments, both social and anthropological, in dialogue with divine grace. Chenu was intent on restoring a 'supernatural illumination' and the 'interior' element to a paradoxical faith (Potworowski, 2001: 47–48).

Chenu, because he was conscious of the deficiency of baroque scholasticism, and of the importance of the current 'modernist questions', as well as the defectiveness of 'modernist answers', set himself against the non-historical exposition of the Thomist system (Chenu, 1985: 141ff.). His resolute focus on the doctrine of incarnation enabled him to negotiate the dialogue between modernism and theology, especially in relation to the material, social and historical aspects of the human situation (Potworowski, 2001: 54, 84; see also Boersma, 2009: 143). Chenu's mission, as he understood it, was to testify to the 'mystery of the incarnation' and its consequence for the 'mystery of theology', the significance of the Christian life and the function of the Church within contemporary society (Potworowski, 2001: 226–27). Moreover, convinced that every era had its own unique divine revelation, he maintained that the disclosure imparted to the twentieth century was the divine 'mystery of incarnation as God's humanisation' (Potworowski, 2001: 226–27).

It is in his doctrine of faith that Chenu begins to introduce his language of incarnation. Edward Schillebeeckx described him as a 'person of hope',¹³ a

¹² This is extracted from a letter to written to Fox by Basden, which is available from the Christian Studies Unit Bath.

¹³ Chenu clearly influenced key point's of Schillebeeckx's theology (1983: 16; see also Hilkert, 1991: 220–39).

‘graceoptimist’, because Congar and Chenu’s ‘optimistic incarnational’ perspective departed from what Giuseppe Dossetti, Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger described as a ‘Christian pessimism’ that sprung from the ‘central role of the Cross’ (Komonchak, 1999: n.p.). While traditional Catholic theology expressed transcendence in terms of exteriority, modernist theology rejected exteriority and spoke in terms of immanence (Kroniek, 1990: 185; see also Komonchak, 1999: n.p.). For Chenu historicity was central to Christianity, and faith was centred on an immanent God:

the theologian works with a history. His ‘data’ are not the natures of things, or the timeless forms; they are events, corresponding to an economy, whose realization is bound to time, just as extension is bound to the body—beneath the order of essences. The real world is this one, not the abstraction of the philosopher. The believer, the believing theologian, enters by his faith into this plan of God; what he seeks to understand, *quaerens intellectum*, is a divine initiative, a series of absolute divine initiatives, whose essential trait is to be without a reason—both the general initiatives of creation, the incarnation, redemption, grace, and the particular initiatives of the gracious predestination of individuals: the sweet and terrible contingency of a love which needs give no account of his benefits or his refusal to benefit. This world is the true world of contemplation, and of theological understanding... (Chenu, 1935: 237; see also Daley, 2005: 362–82)

Therefore, because Christianity was fundamentally an account of redemption, Chenu enthusiastically advocated a return to the notion of God’s divine economy and management of the world, and in particular his plan for salvation to be accomplished through the Church. Chenu’s theory that God was to be found in history bridged the gap between academic theology and *orthopraxis* (Potworowski, 2001: 227–28).

Chenu argued that the ‘economy of salvation takes place in history... Human progress is linked to a continuing incarnation, and this incarnation never remains exterior to society. Grace is social as humanity becomes the mystical body of Christ’ (Chenu in O’Meara, 2002). Chenu argued that a ‘realistic reading of the gospel keeps

us firmly within the concrete economy of salvation and protects us from adopting non-historical ideas of salvation' (2002: 45). He stated:

in the economy of salvation one had to distinguish the final and definitive city of God, which was in course of preparation here below, from the terrestrial institution, embracing all creatures and bound to space and time (what we understand by the historical existence of the church). (1968: 223)

Potworowski, in his conclusion and critique of Chenu, admits that the correlation between Christology and Chenu's application of the 'law of incarnation' lacks structure, distinction and any schematic form. In a culture that was rejecting organized religion and embracing an emancipating anthropology, the Church changed its focus. Its *modus operandi* became missionary in outlook, and it began to proclaim the redemption of '*homo artifex*' as well as '*homo sapiens*' (2001: 227). Chenu having examined the historical and sociological context of medieval scholasticism from the rise in new technology to the sudden realization that man could attain the mastery of nature, argued that:

the new *homo artifex*, maker of shapes and forms, distinguished between the animate and the mechanical, rid himself of the childish fancies of animism and of the habit of seeing divinity in the marvels of nature. The sacred realm which he secularized by this process no longer possessed any properly religious value for him. He knew its place in the universe better than that (1968: 44).

Thus, the first crucial ramification of Chenu's emphasis on the incarnation was the elevation and affirmation of Christianity's human element. This, in turn, because he was intent on 'preserving the integrity of the human in its encounter with God', made him wary of a soteriology that ignored the condition of our humanity. This emphasis on the human introduced a particular experiential subjectivity to faith, while faith itself became an established element in 'theological knowing'. Finally, Chenu's endorsement of the human embraced a wider context through his recovery of a theology of creation. Consequently, humanity's role in establishing the world

became part of the economy of salvation and the building of the kingdom (Potworowski, 2001: 227–28).

Chenu's theology is at times ambivalent and ambiguous in relation to his interpretation of Aquinas and the development of his theology. He does not distinguish between 'continued incarnation' and the natural progress of civilization, nor does he clarify whether his theologizing is to be understood in terms of Christology or ecclesiology (Potworowski, 2001: 229). Furthermore, he neglects to explain systematically the specific correlation between the incarnation of Christ and its impact historically in the Church, as 'continued incarnation', which was to be identified as the 'signs of the times...as an expression of the ongoing structure of incarnation' (Potworowski, 2001: 224). It is patently impossible for the incarnation to be perpetuated or repeated. Chenu's paucity of reference to the historical Jesus is mystifying, especially in view of the fact that he was intent on amalgamating the historical dimension of existence into his theology, where the human manifestation of Christ would have had an instant ramification. Moreover, as Potworowski argues, Chenu leaves us with problems of interpretation (2001: 229–30).

Consequently, Chenu was accused of minimizing the impact of the incarnation.

Henri Rondet, among others, took issue with Chenu's interpretation and plan of the *Summa*, together with his positioning of Aquinas's Christology and the apparent secondary importance accorded to the incarnation as a chance event:

Christ is the way [Chenu's view], he wrote, but he is also the term: one is not able, without discussion, to oppose the mystery of Christ to the mystery of God; it is in Christ that God reveals Himself to man, everything, in fact, has been created for Christ. (Rondet, 1951: 154)

Finally, because of his optimistic theology and his emphasis on the process of divinization, Chenu gives the impression of ignoring the existence of evil. His harmartiology seems incompatible with the iniquitous circumstances facing humanity. It appears that Chenu simply assigned the further development of his thesis to those who would follow (Potworowski, 2001: 230). Boersma argues that

Chenu, because he does not appreciate fully the problem of secularization, is too worldly in his outlook (2009: 30)

Chenu's belief that the Church's place was in the world, became reality with the papal bull, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). In a paper written in 1979, Chenu analysed the change in Catholic social doctrine from Leo XIII to Paul VI, arguing that the Catholic Church used the term 'social doctrine' in diverse but connected senses. Primarily the expression referred to the ideological papal teaching as manifested in the papal 'social encyclicals'. However, these were not based on the Gospels. Nevertheless, Vatican II had encouraged the Church to instigate a wider role and meaning for a 'social doctrine' that was based on scripture. Chenu contested that the new definition indicated a fresh contemporary theological method. This was the Church interacting with the world, a 'Copernican revolution in ecclesiology' (Goergen, 1983: 155–69).

While Chenu neglected hamartiology to concentrate on his 'law of incarnation', Fox appears to expound significantly on Augustine and the doctrine of sin. He rejects the notion of Adam's fall together with the proposition that original sin is bequeathed or predestined; the culprit is dualism, the sin behind all sin (Fox, 1983b: 49–50). Augustine's dualism and his Fall-redemption theology become culpable for all the world's woes and the progressive rise in religious 'sentimentalism and fundamentalism', a persuasion that places an immoderate emphasis on personal salvation (Fox, 1988a: 151).

As far as Fox is concerned, Augustine completely misunderstood the cosmological ramifications of the gospel. 'Too much guilt, too much introspection, too much preoccupation with law, sin, and grace rendered Augustine...and his theology oblivious to what the Eastern Christian church celebrates as theosis, the divinization of the cosmos' (1983b: 63, 76). Equally, the loss of a cosmological dimension, an anthropocentric outlook and an excessive self-criticism rendered sexuality decadent, and this, in turn, led to the suppression of human sensuality. Evidently, according to Fox, Augustine was fond of saying that his Platonic 'God is never disturbed by any passions'. Fox reflects that this probably 'tells us more about Augustine than about God' (1988a: 163).

This Augustinian overemphasis on sin encouraged the predilection towards an introverted personality that was paralysed by guilt—an outlook that infiltrated politics, facilitated the building of empires; and encouraged patriarchy and the subjugation of the vulnerable within society. Original sin paralysis, it ‘divides and thereby conquers, pitting one’s thoughts against one’s feelings, one’s body against one’s spirit, one’s political vocation against one’s personal needs, people against earth, animals and nature in general’ (Fox, 1983b: 53–54). The problem of sin preoccupies our minds so much that the wider questions of social justice and compassion cannot penetrate our preoccupation. Sin manifests itself as the dearth of compassion towards one’s neighbour, the world, and, finally, the rejection of self.

Fox does not deny the presence of sin in the world. His constant appeal for compassion and justice gives credence to the reality of iniquity. That said, if sin in essence is dualism or separation, then genealogically humanity could not be tainted by sin. Augustine’s perverse paradigm also neglected to clarify the ‘new creation or creativity, justice-making, social transformation... Eros, play, pleasure and the God of delight’ (1983b: 10–16, 78). Consequently, humanity has ‘no ego, no self-respect, no tolerance for diversity no love of creation, no sense of humour, no sense of sexual identity or joy’ (Fox, 1988a: 182). Providentially, creation spirituality emanates from a different ethos; it is no longer a dominating and controlling force, but a transformed genus of power that works for, and with people (Fox, 1988a: 53–54).

Aquinas’s eventual identification with ‘left-brain’ scholasticism deprived the world of the Cosmic Christ (Fox, 1988a: 114). Nevertheless, Aquinas’s belief that ‘revelation came in two volumes, the Bible and Nature’, became the catalyst for Fox’s new concept of redemption, resurrection and the ameliorative theology of the Cosmic Christ (Brown and Novick, 2003: n.p.). This, coupled with his Einsteinian paradigm, a holistic inter-connectedness and his panentheistic philosophy, impels him towards a mystic dimension. This predilection is the foundation for Fox’s call for a ‘deep ecumenism’ that will ‘unleash’ the mystical power and wisdom of the world’s religions (1988a: 133–35, 228).

Fox dismisses the concept of a bodily resurrection, and in an exposition of the Paschal Mystery, the Cosmic Christ becomes the incarnation of God in the universe in the form of Jesus as Mother Earth crucified, resurrected and come again.

Consequently, he then defines the biblical promise of human resurrection as ‘aliveness, wakefulness, awareness and rebirth’ (1988a: 38). These result in a portrayal of the Eucharist as the ‘eating and drinking of the wounded earth...the ingesting of a sacrificial victim’ (1988a: 214). While Fox explicitly rejects the notion that creation spirituality has pantheistic nuances, this homage inculcates intimacy, eroticism and an eschatological optimism that the growing veneration for the wounded earth emerges from among the human race. Individually, we are transformed into ‘anointed ones’ called to ‘birth’ the Cosmic Christ in our experience and society the mutual creativity that will transform our existence (1988a: 57, 137–49, 214).

Suel Bartone¹⁴ (2005: n.p.), defines creation spirituality as ‘Christ’s incarnation—birth, teaching, death, and resurrection...as embodiment, in the form of liturgy, arts, connection to the earth, and social justice’ and ‘Christ as the embodiment of God in human beings, and the divinization of creation and human society’. According to Fox, humanity is to ‘birth God’s Son’ in our ‘persons, culture and times’ (1983b: 10). Nevertheless, while Fox recognizes Mary as the literal mother of Jesus, for him, her ‘great salvific teaching...is the non-literal meaning of motherhood’. As Boulton reflects, ‘the great shock and mystery of the incarnation is that now all persons find in Mary their true vocation: to birth, to birth compassion, to birth God. For Fox, the birthing of our life as a life of beauty and a work of art is necessarily a birth of *imago dei* in the cosmos’ (1991: 275).

Fox calls for a ‘non-theistic’ mystical awakening, in rejection of a creed, which envisions deity ‘out there’ or even ‘in here’, the dualism that segregates creation from divinity. In a dictum that is reminiscent of a biblical edict, he draws attention to seven positive principles and a single virtue to inspire and usher in a new millennium and way of doing theology.

Humanity is to live with the wonders of cosmology (a relation to the whole), and live grounded to the earth and ecology. Resist *acedia*, which guarantees arrogance and laziness. Live with passion

¹⁴ Bartone offered an insight into the Techno Cosmic Mass experiment in the UK with which Fox was involved.

(better lustful than listless), which derives from our yearning for union on the personal level. Live with moral outrage and stand up to injustice. Live with compassion and resist fear. Live with telling your truth and resist being gagged by consumerism and its sellers. Live with giving birth and develop all of your creative powers of intellect and imagination. Live for the building of community among all light beings. Resist competitive and envious relations with others. (Fox, 1999a: 331)

Fox's testimonial to Chenu echoes like a mantra through all his books. Moreover, in an article that is a replication of Fox's theology, John R Mabry (1995: n.p.) confirms that it was Chenu who identified 'creation spirituality' as the concealed theme that permeated church history. Chenu, he observes, insisted that creation spirituality had evolved from an ancient traditional heritage that was wholly antithetical to the prevailing theology, especially in relation to the doctrine of sin and redemption. Consequently, while creation spirituality had been repressed and denied, it emerged at times to illuminate the world.

Chenu identified these episodes of enlightenment as periods in history, which encouraged awe and wonder, artistry and the creative impulse, quietude and the courage to speak out when faced with injustice. A divine illumination that attained its zenith in the writings of St Francis of Assisi, in the holiness and tradition of the Desert Fathers, the spirituality of the Rhineland mystics and in the liberating justice and teaching of Chenu. Nevertheless, Mabry is right to insist that Fox was not the 'guru' of creation spirituality—Chenu was. Chenu and Fox had both highlighted an approach to the latent spirituality, which had been precluded because of apathy and a 'poisonous spiritual direction'. Chenu and Fox have 'named it' and swept aside all opposition. However, following Chenu's death, like Elisha who bore Elijah's prophetic mantle, Fox took on the mantle of creation spirituality and the prophetic task, as he understood it. Eschewing traditional theology Fox turned to the world and 'wrote for the masses' (Mabry, 1995: n.p.) Thus Fox turned, in part, to his Jewish heritage, Rabbinic thought, and the Hebrew Scriptures, which were at the heart and mind of the historical Jesus in conjunction with the writings of Martin Buber and

Abraham Joshua Heschel, all of which will be the focus of attention in the next section.

4. The Influence of Judaism and Rabbinic Thinking on Matthew Fox

Seeking the shared attributes of mystical experience among other traditions, Fox's creation-centred theology finds much of its inspiration in the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible. Fox's interest in the Prophets and the Wisdom literature could be attributed to his theological training. However, taking into account the years of intense Catholic teaching and Chenu's influence, it is his use of rabbinic literature and Jewish philosophy that is intriguing. The question is: Does his interest stem from his rediscovered Jewish roots,¹⁵ or does Fox's use of these texts have its origins in interpretations introduced in the writings of Buber and Heschel?

Nevertheless, we will argue here that Fox goes beyond the Hebrew Scriptures. Much of his thought is filtered, as we will see, through that of Martin Buber, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Otto Rank. Finally, an examination of Fox's contributions to *Tikkun*, a bimonthly Jewish critique of politics, culture and society, highlights the affinity they share. Indeed, while Fox's publications are full of references to his many heroes, it seems that Heschel is his soul mate and Fox's first choice as a companion on a desert island (Fox, 1997a: 98).

(a) Martin Buber and Abraham Joshua Heschel's Discourse with Modern Man

Despite professional antipathy, the eventual union between Heschel (1907–1972) and Buber (1878–1965) amalgamated two conflicting strands within twentieth-century Judaism—prophetic theology derived from divine revelation and religion interpreted by social philosophy. Buber and Heschel were intent on reconnecting alienated modern humanity with an invigorated Jewish spirituality (Kaplan, 1994: 213). In an attempt to counteract the rationalistic ethos within modern life and in contrast to Heschel, who turned to the Rabbinic Literature, Buber grounded his philosophy in interpersonal relations (Silberstein, 1989: 405).

¹⁵ See Chapter 1, (a) *The Formative Years*.

Being a modern man, Buber was educated and had travelled widely. However, he had to return to tradition to seek his roots and inform his philosophy. Heschel, while already steeped in the rabbinic tradition, left Poland for Berlin to absorb its European culture and thus become a modern man (Kaplan, 1994: 217–18). Buber mingles terms like ‘revelation’, ‘divine spark’ and ‘mystic’ with the concepts of ‘freedom’, ‘choice’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘alienation’ in his writing in an amalgamation of modern thought and traditional Jewish ethics. This synthesis of Jewish ideals with modern thinking was only viable because, for Buber, religiosity meant ‘*Erneuerung*, renewal, re-creation, re-invention, or the existentialist turning’ (Gohl, 1997: n.p.).

Søren Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard and Hanney, 1992) described as the father of modern existentialist philosophy, the herald of dialectical theology and the antecedent of postmodernist thinking inspired Buber’s earliest work (Law, 2000: 303), especially in relation to Buber’s theories concerning the relationship between the individual and God in *I and Thou* (Buber, 1999: 4; see also Friedman, 2002: 39–40, 334). Christopher Partridge also notes Buber’s ‘personalist epistemology’. For example, in his book *Ich und Du*, he defined the nature of reality and the way humans relate to one another, to the world and to God (1998: 34). Insisting that the ‘I–Thou’ realm exists in the present, and outside any subjective-objective knowledge, Buber apparently grounded his hypotheses on Friedrich Schleiermacher’s arguments in response to the Enlightenment’s critique of religion. Instead of rooting his theology in metaphysics or ethics, he focussed on the pre-cognitive feeling of absolute dependency (Schleiermacher, 1996: xiii, xviii, xxx).

That said, for Buber, in a way that was distinct from that of Schleiermacher, human existence is determined by two fundamentally different kinds of interactions: ‘I–It’ relations and ‘I–Thou’ relations. While the ‘I–Thou’ relationship comprises of a shared, reciprocal dialogue between two autonomous subjects, the ‘I–It’ relationship is a practical relationship between subject and object. For Buber, the inscrutable God is the Eternal Thou and spirituality becomes the space where ‘I and Thou’ encounters take place in the many spheres of our life. God never ceases in accordance with his nature to be You for us: ‘the thou, he remarks, meets me through grace—it is not found by seeking... I step into direct relation with it’ (1999: 24–26). The spirit within Judaism soars, possesses man, in a connecting contemplative bond with God that

hallows the world (Buber, 1967: 179–90). Panentheistically, Buber attempts to disassociate himself from the traditional doctrinal understanding of ‘transcendence and immanence’ and strives towards a mutually inclusive totality that hallows everyday life (Partridge, 1998: 43). He presents this as the unity of world, man and God, not a mystical union but the very essence of communion (Buber, 1999: 18).

Reminiscent of Chenu’s thinking, Buber emphasizes humanity’s involvement with God in the redemption of the world over and above the concept of isolated mysticism. Moreover, while Buber extols the role of Zionism and Hasidic mysticism, nevertheless, like Fox, he also affirmed the study of the Hebrew prophets and the importance of myths within the Jewish tradition (Horwitz, 1989: 355–56). Within Judaism, Buber remarked, ‘an event is worth telling only when it has been grasped in its divine significance’ and interpreted mythically (1967: 105).

While he affirms human individuality, freedom and choice, his existentialism is steeped in Judaism. He never overlooks the fact that all individuals need a community and a relationship with the ‘other’. Thus, in Buber’s synthesis, we have an ‘existential concern for the individual, the social concern with community, and the religious concern with the divine, while the two latter concerns combined, point to the Jewish concern for the Covenant’ (Gohl, 1997: n.p.). Fox presents us with a similar pattern with his concern for the *anawim*, the social call for justice and a transformed community, a religious concern with the Cosmic Christ, and finally the birth of the Global Renaissance.

Buber, like Fox, found inspiration in Eckhart who became the catalyst for his entry into Jewish mysticism (Friedman, 2002: 29). Nevertheless, Fox’s utilization of Buber’s theology appears to be confined to his book *Sins of the Spirit* in which he discusses evil in the world today. While he affirms the sacredness of the flesh, in all its manifestations, he concludes that it is impossible to differentiate between virtue and iniquity. In an attempt to analyse humanity’s predilection for causing havoc, he focuses on the wisdom of the East and West by engaging with Aquinas’s definition of sin as ‘misdirected love’ and examining the analogy among the Eastern theory of the seven chakras and the Western teachings of the seven deadly sins (1999b: 7–17, 139, 282).

Buber posed the question, ‘what should be the “point of attack” in the struggle against evil; and concluded that the “struggle must begin within one’s soul”—all else will follow this’ (1997: 64). Fox, quoting Buber, concludes that the question is not about sinning or not sinning, but concerns ‘those who are pure in heart and those who are impure in heart’ (1999a: 2, 8, 17, 139, 161). Fox’s objective is not to name or redefine sin but to suggest tangible ways of healing sin or, in the words of Buber, ‘to deprive evil of its power’, not by eradicating evil, but by ‘reuniting it with the good’ in the service of God (Buber, 1997: 94–96).

Heschel was a social activist, a rabbi, teacher and one of the most eminent Jewish theologians of the twentieth century. Moreover, while avoiding the humanism inherent within Buber’s philosophy, Heschel was committed to the enhancement of the individual’s humanity. With the intention of constructing a modern rationale for Judaism, he deconstructed modernity and the Enlightenment ideal of rational Greek perception by utilizing the intellectual tools of modernity. While Buber rejected the Jewish law and *mitzvot*, for Heschel they were the foundations of an ‘experience of God’ by way of ‘nature, revelation, holy deed...music, poetry and religion’ (Gohl, 1997: n.p.).

While Buber anchored his philosophy in inter-human relations, Heschel, drawing on the echo of God from Sinai, as revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Talmud, Hasidism and the *Kabbalah*, focused on the manifestation of the divine in the consciousness of the individual (Horwitz, 1989: 364–65). Heschel’s thinking originated from the interdependent relationship between the inner life, traditional theology and his philosophy of religion, while the concepts of ‘awe, wonder and mystery’ served as the starting point that went beyond the existential dimension of faith to the numinous realm of faith (1979: 11–13, 282, 293). Focusing on the manifestation of the divine in the consciousness of the individual, he was also influenced by the *Lurianic Kabbalah* concept of ‘divine sparks’. Thus, as Silberstein comments, he viewed the *mitzvot* as divine commandments, ‘actions that fulfilled the divine need’ (1989: 406).¹⁶

¹⁶ Apparently, Heschel was so obsessed by the idea of reclaiming the sparks inherent within food that he eventually became renowned for his excessive appetite and corpulence. This belief originated from Isaac Ben Solomon Luria (*the Ari*) who founded the *Lurianac Kabbalah*. This *Kabbalistic* notion

Heschel features significantly in Fox's writings, principally in support of his argument for a return to an authentic re-enchanted Jewish ritual. According to Fox, 'Heschel's image of ritual is a cosmic image', and consequently, Judaism becomes a 'morphic field the collective memory, the ancient matrix that not only nourished Jesus but the entire early Christian Community' a recollection of God's dealings with Israel (1995a: 267; cf. 1997a: 253–54; see also Halbwachs and Coser, 1992: 31–33).

Maurice Halbwachs,¹⁷ the French philosopher and sociologist, developed the theory of a 'collective memory' that humanity contributes to and draws from (Halbwachs and Coser, 1992: 21, 31–33). While Halbwachs developed his own imaginative hypothesis, he was a fairly orthodox follower of Emile Durkheim who coined the phrase 'collective consciousnesses'. This also referred to 'the body of beliefs and sentiments common to the average of members of a society' (Halbwachs and Coser, 1992: 1, 24; see also Aron, 1999: 15). In a similar vein Fox and Sheldrake also propose a 'morphic resonance' the 'basis of memory in nature' (1997b: 11).

In Fox's later books, 'ritual' becomes the key, in that it energizes and reinvents the concept of work in a way that negates the prevailing pessimistic and patriarchal outlook. The key to this revitalizing paradigm is Heschel's notion of the power of 'remembrance' and 'ritual in relation to history' (1995a: 253, 262–66). Heschel's philosophy was an attempt to elicit an original authentic awareness of God's interaction with the Jewish nation for the modern world. 'Much of what the Bible demands', writes Heschel, 'can be comprised in one word, "Remember"' (1979: 162). Indeed, faith survives as a recollection of how we were once blessed by the

posited that light and, indeed, all symbols used within Judaism were in fact more than symbols; they were 'reality itself. God's essence within the universe took the form of 'divine sparks' or *tikkun*, which were manifested in every object and action of his will in the physical world. However, during creation God's unity was fragmented when the original divine vessels were broken. 'The Holy Sparks' were scattered throughout the cosmos that dualistically, according to Luria, was split into two parts the kingdom of evil below and the realm of divine light above. Thus, while some sparks returned to their divine source others infiltrated the world. Man's redemptive mission involved the restoration of God's intended order and name by amalgamating the letters YH and WH, which were severed when the vessels broke. The uplifting of the fallen sparks and their reuniting with the divine source signified the restoration of the *Shekinah* light. The dormant sparks were released by positive human actions, which allowed the divine light to manifest itself with a greater intensity hence, Heschel's attempt at redeeming the 'divine sparks' in food (Silberstein, 1989: 402–18; see also Jacobs, 1989: 99–118).

¹⁷ See C. Burkett, 2009, 'Homiletics as mnemonic practice', with reference to the work of Maurice Halbwachs.

manifestation of divine presence in our lives, a reconnecting with ancient myths and the blessing of creation (1979: 162–65).

While Fox's interest in Judaism may arise out of his Jewish background, I would contend that, first, he is impelled towards a Jewish interpretation of scripture because of his rejection of Augustine and the doctrine of original sin. Aquinas' thought,¹⁸ Fox argues, is more congenial to the ethos underlying creation spirituality. Furthermore, in a complete contradiction to Augustinian scholarship Fox redefines Augustine's thinking, arguing that Adam and Eve were created in 'original righteousness' rather than 'original sin' (Fox, 1983b: 5).

Nonetheless, Fox may well be reverting to a Catholic interpretation. While traditional Catholic and Protestant thought have much in common in regard to Augustine, they differ in interpretation, especially in relation to grace. Aquinas revised Augustinian thought into an extremely influential Catholic position. While he supported Augustine's 'literal historical' reading of Genesis 2–3 Aquinas rejected the concept of the Garden of Eden as a paradise it was, he argued, 'not a corporeal place' indeed no different to the physical world today (*Summa*, Prima Pars, Q 102, Art 1, OB 1). Moreover, because Adam and Eve were created good and despite being exposed to temptation, they were capable of resisting both temptations and sin. They were sustained in 'original righteousness' by God's 'habitual grace' from the beginning. Therefore, they resisted sin and would eventually have 'passed into a still better, final state of constitutive immortality and beatific vision' (Hodgson and King, 1983: 178).¹⁹

With the fall, they 'lost the gift of habitual grace...their nature became distorted, wounded, and weakened; henceforth human beings would not be able to not sin' (Hodgson and King, 1983: 178). Thus, their (original sin) was imparted to their descendants therefore, all are sinners, not by 'actual or personal sin but by a sin of nature which is inherited and present in each individual prior to personal (or actual) sins' (Hodgson and King, 1983: 178). In view of Aquinas' term 'original

¹⁸ See the previous section (c) Chenu and Fox in Relation to Aquinas, Augustinian Dualism and Contemplation.

¹⁹ Termed 'habitual grace', 'sanctifying grace' or 'deifying grace'.

righteousness' (1947: 912) it is possible that Fox's concept and interpretation of the phrase 'original blessing' is based on Aquinas.

Rabbinic literature, in contrast, insists on the absolute freedom of the human will and the liberty to choose between good and evil. It describes two inclinations, which are found in every person, *yetzer ha-tov*, the good inclination and *yetzer ha-ra*, the evil inclination. The former inclination urges individuals to do what is right while the latter encourages ungodly behaviour. The struggle against *yetzer ha-ra* is understood as being incessant present from birth a 'human capacity' rather than a 'defining characteristic of human nature' one can only quell it by disciplined self-control. God created the universe and it is inherently good and ordered, in that ethical behaviour is rewarded by a long and prosperous life (Ariel, 1995: 84–85).

Moreover, like all faiths, Judaism has evolved several streams of thought. For example, philosophically, God became conceptualized as self-existent, the first cause of everything, the creator, eternal, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient and incorporeal. Hence, ultimately, key areas of Jewish religious thought, were forced to confront the gulf between God and humankind. Various attempts were made to bridge this gap. While David Nieto (1654–1728) has argued against the influence of deism within Jewish thought in eighteenth-century England, the philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) held that everything existed in God, a form of philosophical pantheism that eventually led to his excommunication from the synagogue (Rosenthal, 1957: 408–409; see also Ariel, 1995: 41).

In seeking to resolve this overemphasis on transcendence by emphasizing God's immanence, an ascetic pietistic Hasidic movement arose in the Rhineland (1590–1250). *Ashkenazicism* believed that the coming Messiah would deliver humanity from sin, a notion that led to a particular theology of personal salvation (Goldberg and Rayner, 1989: 233–46; see also Ariel, 1995: 89; Marcus, 1989: 356–66).

That said, the Hasidic movement, which succeeded the *Kabbalah*, was a multifaceted spiritual movement that evolved during the eighteenth century. Rachel Elior demonstrates that *Habad Hasidism* questioned the nature of the divine presence in the world and, assuming a 'panentheistic-acosmic' perspective, the movement taught seven basic axioms concerning the relationship between God and the world:

1. Pantheism—the world is a manifestation of God.
2. Acosmism—a denial of the existence of the universe as distinct from God.
3. Creation—God as creator.
4. Immanentism—God pervading and permanently sustaining the universe.
5. Panentheism—everything exists in God.
6. The world as a manifestation of God—God incorporates the world into himself.
7. Dialectical reciprocity—the dialectica
8. The assumption that God has no separate existence without the world—because the world is a manifestation and expression of God. (1989: 163)

However, overall Hasidism is generally thought to be intrinsically panentheistic in nature, in that it stresses the omnipresence of God and the idea of *Devekut*—the belief that between the world of God and the world of humanity there is unbroken intercourse (Jacobs, 1989: 122–23; see also Ariel, 1995: 42). As Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (The Besht) declared:

Man must always bear in mind that God is omnipresent and is always with him; that God is, so to speak, the most subtle matter everywhere diffused... Let man realize that when he is looking at material things he is in reality gazing at the image of the Deity which is present in all things. With this in mind man will always serve God even in small matters. (Rosenthal and Dubnow, 2002)

While non-*Hasidic* Orthodox Jews initially regarded this panentheistic theology as heretical, by the mid-1800s the movement was accepted within Orthodox theology however the ideas have not been accepted universally.

Both Buber and Heschel ‘appeal to post-modern man...because they pick him up at the point of his alienation’ but this renewal of interest in a panentheistic Hasidism was also aided by their poetic and inspirational writing (Gohl, 1997: n.p.; see also Silberstein, 1989: 410–18). Meanwhile, Fox argues that Buber and Heschel’s dual emphasis on transcendence and immanence is in harmony with his panentheistic spirituality while, at the same time, Heschel’s rejection of a Greek perspective is in tune with Fox’s antipathy to a ‘fear of the flesh’ inherent within Western theology

and developed under the influence of Hellenistic thought (Britton, 1999: 391; see also Fox, 1999b, 10–15).

(b) Otto Rank: A Prophet for Our Time

Otto Rank (1884–1939), the Austrian psychologist and psychotherapist, was a student of Sigmund Freud. His early work, *Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, in which he applied Freudian techniques to the interpretation of myths, became a classic of psychoanalytic literature. Following a contretemps with Freud, Rank broke away and developed his own psychoanalytic theories (1952: vii-viii; see also Fox, 1995b: 200). Fox pays tribute to Rank's contribution to creation spirituality as follows:

I consider Otto Rank to be one of the great spiritual giants of the twentieth century, a genius as a psychologist and a saint as a human being. His work, more than any other psychologist, provides the appropriate psychological basis for Creation Spirituality. In his last book, *Beyond Psychology*, he warns that we must move beyond psychology and look for cosmology and mysticism, social justice, and feminist wisdom if we are to survive as a species his deep understanding of creativity makes him a mentor for all of us living in a postmodern world.... His emphasis on the birthing process and the artist (he defines neurosis as the 'failed artist'), on feminism, on societal values, on cosmology (becoming part of the 'Whole' again), and on the 'beyond' and the mystical union, all make him a deep thinker in the Creation Spiritual tradition. (1995b: 199–200; cf 2004a; see also Rank, 1958: 227)

Fox drew attention to Rank's analysis of death and resurrection in an article published in *Tikkun*: 'the most profound grasp of Easter comes, I believe, not from a Christian writer but from the Jewish prophet and feminist psychologist, Otto Rank' (1999c). Rank, according to Fox, held the belief that the Christian doctrine of Christ's resurrection was the most 'revolutionary idea' ever hypothesized, while the 'fear of death' was the primary impediment to the 'creative processes', which also led to the 'fear of life' (1999c). Rank was convinced that

Jesus and Paul *democratized* soul by putting forth the belief that *everyone resurrects from the dead*. Death is no longer anything to be feared by anyone. For believers, the Easter event symbolizes the triumph of life over death, spring over winter, justice over injustice, liberation over captivity. (Fox, 1999c: n.p.; see also Rank, 1958: 143, 237)

Hence, death is no longer a threat and this assurance allows us to get on with living and therefore, creating. Christ's 'empty tomb' becomes a 'fertile womb' and Deuteronomy's injunction 'I put before you life and death, choose life' becomes 'Choose birth. Choose creativity. Give birth' (Fox, 1999c).

Subsequently, Fox argues that it is only in the light of the mystical Cosmic Christ that the Easter story can be appreciated. The resurrection was not about the historical Jesus. Indeed, the disciples did not encounter the historical Jesus, it was the risen Lord and that is a Cosmic Christ title. Human life, death and resurrection are a cosmic mystery, and while we do not know the form of our resurrection, our liberation from the fear of death is the open door to a fuller life and a spiritual transformation (Fox, 1999c: n.p.).

Rank, according to Fox, also held the belief that humanity, especially as articulated by Christianity, had retained its 'pagan soul', given that, according to Fox, the Early Church's faith from its first inception was a Mother Goddess egalitarian religion (Rank, 1958: 236–37; see also Fox, 1988a: 236). These religions, in Rank's opinion, depicted the Mother as giving birth to a divine son with whom she had a sexual relationship. The Early Church, however, in contrast to the Isis legend, depicted the socio-prophetic mission of their divine son as having a linear relationship with humanity, rather than a vertical incestuous relationship with the Mother. Thus, the Mother Goddess was reborn as Mary, the virgin, while the 'divine son' became incarnate as the Son of God (Fox in Brown and Novick, 1993: n.p.).

Fox, in support of Rank's theory, also maintains that the return of the Goddess to our collective consciousness is a sign of our divine creativity. While Christ was designated 'Sophia-lady wisdom' by the Early Church, Fox reasons, that by the time the second generation of male leaders had come to power, this feminine principle had

been rejected and Christ was given the appellation Logos in lieu of Sophia. Even so, Fox conjectures that the goddess eventually returned at the beginning of the eleventh century triumphantly to Chartres Cathedral, which was built on a 'Pagan' sacred site devoted to the Goddess of Grain, or as Fox observes, 'to Mary the Goddess' (Brown and Novick, 1993: n.p.).

Moreover, if the 'fruit of Mary's womb represents a new creation, then Mary's womb represents the new cosmos' (Fox, 1983b: 74). Fox echoes Rank's concepts of different cultures and ancient mythology and his theory of the goddess to strengthen his own call for a return to the native ancient wisdom and inclinations towards an eco-feminist theology. In addition, in his book, *Beyond Psychology*, Rank warns that we 'must move beyond psychology and look for cosmology and mysticism social justice and feminine wisdom if we are to survive as a species' (1995b: 199–200). It seems that Rank has already addressed most of Fox's themes.

(c) *Tikkun: A Jewish Critique of Politics, Culture and Society*

In 1996, Fox received the *Tikkun* National Ethics Award from the American Association of Pastoral Counsellors in recognition of his many contributions to the spiritual life of American society (2002a). Fox is not only interested in Jewish thought; he also seeks to contribute to it, as a regular contributor to *Tikkun* a liberal Jewish periodical, the core vision of which is to 'transform, heal and repair' the world by means of a neo-*Hasidic* spiritual renewal as formulated in the theological writings of Heschel (*Tikkun*, 2003: n.p.).

If we compare Fox's thought with *Tikkun's* founding principle, and the holistic Judaism espoused by the periodical, it becomes apparent that there are several parallels. For example, *Tikkun* maintains that social change and inner changes are indivisible and, like Fox, advocate a world in which plurality and difference are respected. Striving for transformation, *Tikkun* supports the struggle for social justice and peace and is involved with many diverse movements such as feminism, environmental issues and the call for economic justice, parity for the disabled, civil rights, gay rights and the labour movement—common themes in Fox's writings (*Tikkun*, 2003: n.p.).

In support of Fox's argument, according to *Tikkun*, these movements have ignored an important facet of human life—the spiritual dimension. This spiritual aspect, *Tikkun* maintains, would create a real alternative to society's cultural selfishness, materialism and cynicism. A new attribute, with its vision of healing, would transform the world by facilitating true social justice, ecological sanity, world peace, inner healing for humanity and the ability to respond to creation with awe and wonder. These themes are at the core of Fox's spiritual prophetic manifesto that he set forth in *Creation Spirituality*, where he attempts to dialogue with issues of worldwide significance, while joining a particular understanding of Christian mysticism with the contemporary struggle for social justice, feminism, environmentalism and wholeness in the twenty-first century (1991a).

This principle is rooted, *Tikkun* argues, in the Jewish commandments, the experience of slavery in Egypt, the Exodus journey and the tradition of the Jewish prophets. Moreover, these memories and experiences enable *Tikkun* to fight for the redistribution of wealth and the democratization of all economic and political institutions by standing in solidarity with all who are oppressed. These concepts echo Heschel's theology and mirror Fox's interest in the prophetic Hebrew Scriptures. Nevertheless, it also brings to mind the ethos behind the worker-priest movement and liberation theology, which eventually drew Fox to study Leonardo Boff's theology (*Tikkun*, 2003: n.p.).

Tikkun endeavours to demonstrate the 'deeply spiritual and joyous aspect' of Judaism while actively seeking dialogue concerning spirituality and healing with non-Jews who are involved in the healing and repair of the world. While many adherents are atheists or secularists, *Tikkun* is a liberal alternative that seeks to speak to the many Jews who have been marginalized by the 'conservatism, spiritual emptiness, sexism, and homophobia' prevalent within some Jewish sects. Its mission is conspicuously similar to that of Fox, who seeks to speak to those disaffected with the Catholic Church, as well as the spiritually alienated among all faiths (*Tikkun*, 2003: n.p.).

The magazine claims a fundamental connection with the *Zohar*, the central text of the *Kabbalah*. However, while *Tikkun* originally meant the 'raising' of the 'Holy Sparks' that invest life with sacramental significance, clearly the meaning has changed. *Tikkun Olam* now denotes the spiritual 'repair of the world'. *Tikkun* within

the contemporary Jewish culture, with which Fox is connected, focuses more on the social, political, and literary perspective rather than the cosmic-occult dimension of *Lurianism*—a ‘*tikkun olam*’ that involves all (*Tikkun*, 2003: n.p.).

According to Michael Lerner, a student of Heschel, it is only through the transfiguration of humanity via six stages of consciousness that *Tikkun*’s vision for social justice can be achieved. At present, *Tikkun*’s immediate function is to achieve this transformation by drawing on a ‘Jewish, Kabbalistic, mystical and neo-*Hasidic* approaches to God’. This will result in God’s presence pervading the world, while a reawakened humanity develops a heightened sense of perception that will reveal God’s presence to them (2009: n.p.). Once again, Lerner’s statement brings to mind the four paths of creation spirituality that Fox declares is a call to ‘transformation into that tradition, which is more ancient, more celebrative and more justice orientated...a new Pentecost, a new creation and a spiritual awakening that all the world’s people and all the worlds’ religions might share in’ (1983b: 305). Loved or loathed, we will now turn our attention to Robert Bly who one author has described as the ‘shaman of the dark side’.²⁰ Primarily, the focus will be on his book *Iron John*, and the mythopoetic branch of the men’s movement relative to Fox.

5. Robert Bly and Iron John: An Insight into Fox’s Reflection in the Garden

Robert Bly was born in western Minnesota in 1926. He graduated from Harvard and, in 1966, co-founded ‘American Writers Against the Vietnam War’ movement. Meanwhile, as a poet, author, activist and leader of the Mythopoetic Men’s Movement he has published many books, which celebrate the ‘power of myth, Indian ecstatic poetry, meditation, and storytelling’ (Bly, 2001: n.p.). While his most famous work *Iron John: A Book about Men*, focused the media’s attention on the men’s movement, there were repercussions and Bly became ‘one of the more vilified men of the 1990s’ (Herrera, 1994: n.p.). This part consists of two components. First, we will examine *Iron John*, the subsequent critique and its relevance to Chenu and Fox and then we will apply the same parameters to Robert Bly and the Men’s Movement.

²⁰ L. E. M, Bowman, 1989, *Poet Robert Bly: Shaman of the Dark Side* (University of North Carolina at Greensboro).

(a) *Fairy Tales: Metaphors for the Inner Life.*

While few of us actually believe that there are ‘fairies at the bottom of our gardens’, good stories are irresistible and, traditionally, fairies have furnished a bridge between the secular and the transcendent (Fyleman, 1920: 13). Nevertheless, as Diane Purkiss explains, in her cultural history of fairies, the numinous and at times surreal characterizations within Victorian fairy tales coexist with a forbidding world that is full of whimsical supernatural beings that appear as protagonists. These creatures and wild men, who are prominent in many of the Grimm fairy-tales, inhabit the surrounding vegetation, ancient forests and forbidding darkness. Entering fairyland signified rebirth. Accordingly, within medieval romance, having been emancipated from his birth mother, the emerging boy is transformed into a hero with the gift of power or kingship, bestowed on him by the fairies (Purkiss, 2001: 3, 69, 251).

Of remote origin and presented in myriad permutations, these tales reflect problems that traverse cultural boundaries and what might be called our mythic sensibility. Purkiss argues that these ancient fairy tales were born of fear, fear of the dark, of death, fear of the rites of passage, notably birth and sex, which they presided over in that they were viewed as ‘gatekeepers to another world’ (2001: 4, 11, 70). Some were benevolent, others malevolent, the heralds of misfortune who opportunistically spirited away babies, virgins or young men (2001: 18–19, 108, 254). These ancient tales are the harbingers of William Shakespeare’s mischievous Puck in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, James Barrie’s Edwardian *Peter Pan* and J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* with its depiction of the Elven-city Gondolin (Purkiss, 2001: 263–64, 282–83). Indeed, I would argue that Tolkien’s main Middle-Earth characters, Gandalf and Frodo Baggins, bear comparison with the ‘wild man’, a powerful adult mentor and the ‘boy’, the persona in the Grimm fairy tale *Iron John*.

Obviously, fairy tales may be interpreted from a variety of perspectives and in ways that are commensurate with the interests and suppositions of the reader. In essence, in the book *Iron John*—a work that has conspicuously inspired Fox (2008: 56, 178, 216)—Bly presents us with his image of masculinity. Anthropological evidence, he argues, demonstrates that, historically, boys were initiated into manhood, either by cultural rites or by working with their fathers (Bly, 1999: 15). The ‘industrial revolution’, however, severed men’s connection with the land, religion isolated men

from their sexuality while, at the same time, the feminist movement nullified the concept of the 'wild man'. Furthermore, as modern boys are mainly raised by women and alienated from their fathers, they are without the influence of mature male mentors. They are no longer 'warriors', they have become soft and vulnerable having lost their connection to the earth (Bly 1999: 18–19, 26). As a panacea Bly anglicizes and utilizes the Grimm²¹ fairy tale *Iron John* as a vehicle to explore the fairy tale of the 'wild man' (Iron John) and his foster son (1999: 5, 8; see also Zipes, 1992: 4).

(b) Robert Bly and the Tale of Iron John

The German version of *Iron John* was a parable about a boy maturing into adulthood. Briefly, Iron John, the wild man from the forest, is captured and locked in a cage in the palace courtyard. The prince's ball accidentally rolls into the cage but the wild man will only return the ball if he is set free. Having stolen the key from under the Queen's pillow and, fearful of the consequences, the boy agrees to go with Iron John into the forest. Iron John has many treasures, which he orders the boy to guard without touching. The boy disobeys, and his finger and hair become golden. Subsequently, he is forced to leave the woods for a life of poverty in the city. Nonetheless, if in need he is to call the name of Iron John three times. He takes lowly work at another palace and, when war looms, he calls on Iron John who provides him with horses and soldiers to defend the kingdom. Eventually identified as a prince he marries the King's daughter. At the wedding, Iron John reveals himself to be a (third) King, released from a curse because the boy has set him free.

Leaving the original tale behind, Bly's version, while echoing the tale about boys becoming men, resonates with several layers of meanings. The story becomes a protracted allegory, a paradigm for an initiation into manhood and the medium by which Bly explores male bonding rituals and the meaning of manhood within contemporary society. At the core of Bly's argument is the notion that there is a 'wild man' within each 'male', which needs to be released. 'It is imperative for males to become "Iron Johns", or else we shall never know our authentic maleness... Bly has created a new myth..."our story"...[and] part of our collective unconscious' (Zipes, 1992: 4, 8–9).

²¹ German fairy tale, *Der Eisenhans* or *Iron Hans*, published by Wilhelm Grimm in 1850.

While the Grimm version has no relevance to Fox, Bly's analysis offers areas of interest, which are relevant to Fox's life these are, the man who is 'other-than-the-father', the enclosed garden and the community of beings.

First, Iron John, who is 'other-than-the-father', is pivotal to the tale in that he separates the boy from his home and mother (Lundegaard, 1991: n.p.). He materialises as a human mentor who guides the boy into the forest, for his first initiation and ultimately—transformation (Bly, 1999: 14, 30). Secondly, in Bly's analysis the 'wild man' is but one of seven, a powerful archetype who takes his place in the community of beings within the boy's psyche who guide and accomplish his metamorphosis from boy to man. These are:

(i) *The King*: there is a physical king and a mythical king with positive and negative qualities who, while providing positive male role models, are also fallible, in that, power can degenerate into abusive and controlling behaviour.

(ii) *The Knight or Warrior*: while putting duty first, is arrogant with a sense of superiority, and a necessary step to manhood, which becomes tempered by age bringing its own wisdom.

(iii) *The Garden or Lover*: that depicts man's emotional nature, the place to develop spirituality.

(iv) *Iron John*: is a free spirit who springs from nature, a spiritual teacher who bridges the gap between boyhood and maturity.

(v) *The Trickster*: or jester lightens our darkness.

(vi) *The Cook*: or 'shaman' 'is our inner voice' who represents our conscience and instinct.

(vii) *The Grief Man*: finally, there appears the 'grief man' who gives us permission to grieve and examine the depths of our psyche. (Bly, 1999: 5, 69, 92, 127, 146, 228–29; see also Henderson, 2008)

While Fox does not mention these seven entities he possibly recognizes the 'beings' within his own psyche. He makes numerous references to Bly's books and poetry

(2008a) and others have identified his tendency towards the Romanticism that exalted the beauty of nature (Boulton, 1991: 269–78; see also Keen, 1989: 54; Keen, 1999: 3; Meikle, 1985: 3) while Santmire identifies him as a shaman with the ‘anti-urban, romantic individualism of the Thoreauvian tradition’ (2000: 21). In view of his romantic disposition one is tempted to hypothesise that the character Iron John who guided the boy is synonymous with Fox’s own mentor Père Chenu.

Ultimately, the boy ‘must seek the garden with four walls’, which is to be found within us all and where former emotions that require healing emerge and materialize. Once discovered, within this paradisiacal garden, our anguish, whether caused by parents, our gods, those around us, or even ourselves, is free to emerge and emotional healing may begin. Referring to this garden, Bly writes:

In the walled garden, as in the alchemical vessel, new metals get formed as the old ones melt. The lead of depression melts and becomes grief... The enclosed garden then suggests cultivation as opposed to rawness, boundaries as opposed to unbounded sociability, soul concerns as opposed to outer obsessions, passion as opposed to raw sexuality, growth of soul desire as opposed to obsession with generalised greed for things...The enclosed garden encourages true desire for the infinite, more than greed for objects; and we know that all true desire is dangerous. (1999: 127; cf. Fox, 1997a: 22)

The metaphorical garden becomes a sanctuary and a place of regular pilgrimage in a lifetime’s quest for inner healing. Simultaneously, as the internal torment subsides, the deep spirituality emerges, which releases the warrior within, who, in turn, confronts and transforms the world. The mature man that emerges is secure and trusts his inner voice (Bly, 1999: 129, 132–34, 157, 230).

Other scholars, while acknowledging Bly’s exposition, contend that the tale can also be interpreted as a Jungian synopsis of the difficult and often painful process of personal individuation by which Jung’s (1991) archetypes are given expression in a specific human life. Indeed, much of the literature in the emergent men’s movement

stems from Jungian archetypes, a self-portrait of a psychic instinct (Moyers, 1999: n.p.; see also Culbertson, 1993: 219–32; Wolf-Light, 1994: n.p.).²²

Jung who interestingly compared the creation of a garden to the process of individuation, understood the venture as the most important goal in life—the process by which we truly become ourselves—our unique destiny. He compared individuals to trees and used the metaphor of gardening to describe analysis (Jung, 1966: par. 229; see also Meredith, 2005: 27, 31). Thus, in Jungian analysis, *Iron John* becomes analogous with the ‘persona the social role by which one is identified’ (Moyers, 1999: n.p.). The boy corresponds to the undeveloped psyche while the princess represents the anima. Finally, the royal couple become the image of the realized self, while in a parallel metamorphosis *Iron John* emerges as a great king that represents his young protagonist’s total transformation (Moyers, 1999: n.p.).

(c) *A Critique of Iron John*

The book, while praised by some, has also drawn much criticism. Joe Dolce argues that *Iron John* presents men as victims and full of self-pity (1993: n.p.). Similarly, Erik Lundegaard contends that ‘ironically Bly’s language is so moist and New Agey and self-congratulatory that he makes the message unpalatable. Bly’s language is too womanly for a book about men’ (1991: n.p.). So much so that in the end the significance of his argument becomes distasteful. In contrast, Robert Moore, a psychologist, believes that ‘when the cultural and intellectual history of our time is written, Robert Bly will be recognized as the catalyst for a sweeping cultural revolution’ (Bly, 2001: n.p.). Charles Molesworth, on the other hand, contends, that Bly ‘writes religious meditations for a public that is no longer ostensibly religious’ (Bly, 2001: n.p.). However, Erica Simmons points out that while Bly does not seem

²² All three observe this Jungian influence within Bly’s writing and remark on his resulting attitude towards women. As Wolf-Light notes, Bly’s definition of the anima as ‘unassertive, passive and lacking vitality’ is illuminating in contrast to the generally accepted masculine values of ‘active and assertive vitality’. However, both these characteristics represent the ‘stereotypical qualities’ associated with both women and men. The feminine traits of ‘passiveness, unassertiveness and lack of vitality’ symbolize the qualities that have historically been instrumental in the subordination of women while, largely being valued and desired as feminine attributes by men. Thus, Bly reinforces the precise sexism and inequality that he claims to despise; and his validation justifies and affirms men’s superiority (1994).

to have a precise vision of his perfect man 'he extracts endless significance out of the story' (1992: n.p.).

Accordingly, Zipes describes Bly's book as a 'nightmare'. As he argues, 'there is much to unravel in Bly's book: the fairy tale as myth, the myth as our story, our story as initiation and salvation, the salvation as nightmare. And, like any good nightmare, we must come to terms with the hidden meanings if we are to overcome our fear. In fact, Zipes argues:

Bly's mythopoetic projections and dilettante references to myth and folklore obscure the origins and significance of Iron *Hans*, while his eclectic reconstruction of putative initiation rituals has more to do with his own yearning for a male mentor or his desire to become a male guru than with providing a rigorous analysis of the problems facing men in contemporary America. (1992: 8)

(d) *Iron John in Relation to Chenu and Fox*

As Fox prepared to go to Paris, he reflected on his family's influence remembering the home where he learned the 'love of nature, the love of ideas, ecumenism and lessons in letting go' (1997a: 43) and especially, his father George, whose own childhood was much harder than his own. They were poor and George, whose own father was crippled by poliomyelitis, was responsible for the family during the depression. An angry child, who vented his rage on the football field, he attracted the attention of the college scouts and subsequently, this Augustinian education taught him 'morality and religion and offered models of male adulthood from high school through college' (1997a: 43–54). He eventually became an assistant football coach at the University of Wisconsin, prior to the 1939 war.

Fox admits that, while friends, they were not close, indeed they only discussed Fox's calling to the priesthood once. Moreover, George, while supportive of Fox's ministry, was not happy when Fox got involved in controversial political issues (1997a: 43–54). The question is, did George, faced with Fox's poliomyelitis, remember that it was his father's poliomyelitis that had caused his own poverty and hardship? Was that the reason for his distant attitude and apparent lack of empathy?

Fox recognizes that his father's anger stemmed from his deprived childhood. This was confirmed by a friend who remarked that George was the angriest men he had ever met. 'He expressed surprise that George had a son who was a priest and said, "He must have married a heluva woman" to have tamed him' (1997a: 44). George and Beatrice were both stubborn yet, despite parental disapproval when they got married, seven children, frequent tempestuous disagreements and George's sullenness, the marriage survived (1997a: 43–54).

Fox, reminiscing, remembers his father's stern attitude towards correct behavior in church,²³ in that, the children, to prove that they were attentive, were quizzed on the sermon. However, 'if things got out of hand' the culprits had to kneel with their hands on the card table for an hour (1997a: 46). While one can push an analogy too far, if we look at the tale *Iron John* again, the boy, having unlocked the cage and retrieved his ball declares, 'wait a minute! If my parents come home and find you gone, they will beat me' (Bly, 1999: 13) and he and the Wild Man leave for the forest together. Bly argues that all men have lost their connection to their fathers. Did Fox feel that this applied to him? A careful reading of Fox's autobiography leaves one with the impression that there was tension within his relationship with his father. Therefore Henderson's analysis of the 'garden' is interesting:

The garden or the lover is an emotional being. We must find the garden with four walls that lies deep within us. This is where we find love; love for our father who has abandoned us. Love for our mother who controlled us, and so forth. We must find balance in our life at this time. We must embrace our feelings. We must build a temple to our daemons and our gods. (2008: n.p.)

The character Iron John, who is 'other-than-the-father', removes the boy from his home to teach him to be a man, is of particularly importance in Bly's book whiles Chenu is central to Fox theology and mentioned constantly throughout his books. In

²³ As an aside, Bly reminds the reader, that exuberance in children was frowned upon in the nineteenth-century especially, if they had been restless during long church services (Bly, 1999: 14).

1990 Fox wrote an article entitled ‘Thank you, Père Chenu! my mentor’²⁴ and in an online chat page he writes:

My mentor Père Chenu a French Dominican, named the Creation Spiritual Tradition for me and mining that has been my life work for it shows another side to Christianity. My number one issue was the integration of Spirituality and Mysticism with Social Justice (now including eco and gender justice too) These themes play through all my 25 books. (2003a: Topic 183)

We have no way of assessing whether Fox’s devotion and admiration of Chenu was reciprocated. He may well have been just one of many students as far as Chenu was concerned. Nonetheless, just as Iron John is proffered as the prince’s second, initiating father, who did what his first father could not do—send him into the world to realize his golden talents (Moyers, 1999: n.p.) it seems feasible that Chenu became, in some subliminal way, other-than-the father in Fox’s thought. Chenu the source of divine teaching, the initiator of his spirituality led him into the forest, that represent the world or even the Catholic Church, to develop his spiritual potential.

(e) The Elusive Garden and a Road Well Travelled

Analogous with the Garden in *Iron John*, which was a place to develop a deep spirituality, his garden, for Fox, is the garden at Loras Dubuque where he spent his novitiate years.²⁵ Reminiscing in his autobiography it brought to mind much of his experience within the Dominican fold that rendered ‘garden work’, while dangerous, possible. At the time it was an oasis that was ‘set apart for inner work’ and ‘a place to develop deep introversion’ (Fox, 1997a: 22; Bly, 1999: 129). Fox’s allusion to danger possibly refers to Chenu’s teaching that the ‘contemplative act...is a sort of concentration...sharing in the divine life...the mystery of a communion with God’ (1960: 65–74).

²⁴ I was unable to trace this article (‘Creation’, 6 May/June 1990: 19). It is probably taken from *Creation Spirituality Magazine* which is out of print. Fox’s quotation is taken from an online blog named ‘The Well’.

²⁵ See Chapter 1, §3, (b) *Novitiate Training and the Emergence of Brother Matthew*.

The road ahead, for the boy, incorporated several phases that prepared him for manhood. The Holy Grail was the elusive garden, which may only be entered by the relinquishing of old values and gaining independence. This the boy accomplishes with his acceptance of Iron John as his mentor. The second goal was the acquiring of self-discipline and the control of his compulsive urges and finally self-awareness. The curtailing of the id and ensuing maturity eliminates egotism and cultivates the ability to integrate with others in preparation for his entrance into the world of work (Bly, 1999: 39, 54–55).

The task of developing self-dependence, self-discipline, self-awareness and the ability to live in harmony with others, as mentioned in the tale, are all character-building qualities valued by those who nurture children. Nevertheless, they are all, in one way or another, implicated at a deeper level within monastic communities. The four traditional elements within the Dominican orders are the common life of the community, and the vows, prayer and study. Of necessity, ‘common life’ means the developing of self-discipline and self-awareness to live in a close community, while sharing all you possess both physically and spiritually with others.

At the end of the fifth year, the Profession of Solemn Vows entails a life dedicated to poverty, chastity and obedience. These stipulations are demonstrated by the Dominican motto *Contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere* (to contemplate and to give to others the fruits of contemplation) and the study of *Veritas* (truth), while their definitive motto is *Laudare, benedicere et praedicare* (to praise, to bless and to preach). The various facets of the Dominican life may be summarized as the assertion of the preaching mission of the Order, the study of sacred truth and the solemn recitation of the Divine Office. It is a calling to poverty and consecrated celibacy. While the vow of obedience releases the monk from his own desires in obedience to the will of God and his religious superior, it also liberates him for service. Obedience is the primary vow and the means by which the whole community operates (Zagano, 2006: ix, xviii).

However, while *Iron John* advocates the development of ‘self-dependence’, conversely life within the monastic community entails the denial of autonomy and the capacity to act with freewill. The rigours of monastic life, by necessity, imply the breaking of old habits and the gradual formation of a malleable personality as

selfhood diminishes. The rawness of youth recedes as the monk embraces life within the boundaries of his order, while relinquishing materialism and sociability to cultivate and deepen his 'soul life'.

Moreover, towards the end of the tale, Bly refers to a three-legged horse that metaphorically represents what cripples us. He describes it as a horse with a 'shamed leg', while at the same time, alluding to the emotional suffering and shaming inflicted by the Catholic Church on its adherents (1999: 160). This thought, encapsulates Fox's life, from the poliomyelitis that resulted in his permanent disability to the emotional pain that the Catholic Church inflicted with their critique of his work, the rejection of his writing and finally dismissal after thirty-four years as a Dominican and twenty seven years as an ordained Catholic priest. As Fox remarked he had the three choices, 'to hide under a rock, which is what the Vatican wants; laicization, the choice Brazilian theologian Fr. Leonardo Boff made in similar circumstances; or the option I chose, which I call a lateral move, to work within the Episcopal Church' (Gibeau, 1994).

In 1994, Fox had a dream. Apparently he saw himself standing outside a 'cemetery gate' that was symbolic of the entrance to a 'dying church' situated at the Luxembourg Garden in Paris. In the dream, he is expelled from the 'garden within', thus metaphorically leaving the 'protection of the cloister' that he had come to value during his novitiate training. The vocation continues, but now it is 'grief work', an allusion, I would argue, to his disputes with the Vatican and 'the grief man', the last of the persona in the community of beings within the psyche in *Iron John* (1997a: 246).

Serendipitously, and this is probably the main reason why Fox empathizes with the tale, the journey described in *Iron John* is, in essence, analogous with Fox's four paths of creation spirituality in *Original Blessing* (1983b). Arguably, we may presume that the boy was young and guileless and that life prior to the journey was carefree, full of awe and wonder (the *Via Positiva*). As reality intrudes, the struggle with narcissism introduces the necessity to embrace growth, pain and change (the *Via Negativa*). The boy emerges from the garden renascent, a phoenix from the ashes and a spiritually mature warrior (the *Via Creativa*). Having conquered his subliminal self,

he is now prepared to seek a cause to fight for, and, ultimately, to transform the world (the *Via Transformativa*).

(f) *Fox and Bly: The Sacred Masculine*

In 2008 Fox describing himself as male-feminist wrote *The Hidden Spirituality of Men*, which offered ‘ten archetypes of authentic male spirituality’ while arguing that if we can,

balance our left- and right-brain ways of knowing, it will mean the emergence of more balanced men and women. The Sacred Marriage of the mind produces concrete results... The importance of seeking and achieving an androgynous inner nature is underscored by Carl Jung, as well as by Robert Bly. (2008: 268)

Referring frequently to Bly, Fox examines the sacred masculine, and the Jungian archetypes from the green man to the spiritual warrior who inspire us to change the world. Nonetheless, the story begins with Bly who led the mythopoetic branch of the men’s movement that was inspired by the publication of *Iron John* and underlined by a Jungian philosophy. The term mythopoetic alludes to the movements utilization of ‘myth ritual, symbolism, imagery, psychodrama, activity, and ceremony in the context of gatherings, retreats, and group meetings as mediums for change in men’s personal constructions, or myths, of masculinity’ (Baker, 2006: n.p.) and we will start the following section with an examination and critique of Bly’s involvement in the movement.

(g) *Robert Bly and the Men’s Movement*

Susan Faludi (1991b)²⁶ observes that, during the 1970s, Bly encouraged both men and women to embrace the ‘Great Mother’ in an attempt to foster a ‘feminine peace-loving spirit’ (1991a). However, as men’s political activism grew, Bly abandoned the feminine principle and formed a subdivision—the deeply masculine mythopoetic

²⁶ While, Faludi has described herself as a feminist thinker, her book has been described as ‘an important public force in the contemporary backlash against feminism’ (Tacey, 1997: 53). Conversely, Maggie Gallagher described the book as the ‘sound of feminism committing suicide’ (1992).

branch that was at variance the other 'images of manhood' (Bliss, 1987: 21). In an illuminating interview, Bly made the following declaration:

We no longer have images of 'real men'... Stereotypical sissies have replaced macho men... Men used to make models for what a man is from the 'Iliad' and the 'Odyssey' and places like that... One of the things we do is go back to the very old stories, 5,000 years ago, where the view of a man, what a man is, is more healthy. (Faludi, 1991a: n.p.)

As Bly argues passionately men have 'awakened their feminine principle only to be consumed by it. They had gone soft and The Great Mother's authority has become too great' (Faludi, 1991a: n.p.). Now the emphasis must be on creating a safe environment where men are less fearful of self-revelation. While Bly encouraged men to obtain therapeutic release through myth, poetry, sweat-lodges, and excursions into the woods to 'beat drums', and 'express their emotions' by hugging, the men's movement concentrated on working through grief issues and anger management towards emotional rehabilitation (Torgovnick, 1994: 155–70). These mythopoetic weekend retreats, conferences and workshops create a 'men only' space in an environment that focuses on the man's individual circumstances. The goal being a mature masculinity, that is willing to embrace emotion, face responsibility and live a life of integrity in the world (Bliss, 1987:21).

The Man Kind Project²⁷ purports to be inclusive relative to 'faith, age, colour, class, sexual orientation, gender, ability, ethnicity and nationality'. Their Wildman Weekends have been named after the 'King, Warrior, Magician and Lover', the symbolic characters from the boy's id in *Iron John*. Their *modus operandi* follows three paths 'The Descent', 'The Ordeal' and 'The Homecoming', during which each individual is tested physically, mentally and emotionally until he is able to identify his 'life's mission' and be a role model to others (Loyer and Crawford, 2003: n.p.).

According to David Throop the mythopoetic movement, was interested in 'men's inner work: recovery, working through grief issues, and anger management'.

²⁷ Classified as one of the human potential movements that began in the 1960s the *Man Kind Project* was a branch of the mythopoetic movement.

Introspective in focus, it was mainly 'apolitical', although much of the agenda was of the 'non-marxist left' infused with 'environmentalism, paganism, pacifism, milder feminisms, anti-racism and anti-military' (1996: n.p.). Holding diverse views on Christianity, it attracted liberal clergy and, while homosexuality was accepted, gay issues were not pivotal. Nonetheless, the mythopoetic movement, both leaders and followers, give the impression of being mainly white, middle-class, heterosexual men and it could be argued that Bly's standpoint may well encourage the regressive masculinity that is destructive and anti-female.

(h) A Critique of the Men's Movement

Predictably, contemporary feminist writers have critiqued the violence and inherent anti-feminism in *Iron John* (Faludi 1991b: 312; see also Thistlethwaite, 1992: 416). However, the work has also been critiqued by men. While John Rowan (1987) utilizes similar Jungian notions to Bly, he seems to have retained a more pro-feminist outlook. Others have not been so sympathetic and have critiqued Bly and *Iron John's* air of New Age machismo (Kimmel, 1995: 15; see also Tacey, 1997: 1–2; Messner, 1993: 723–24). Ken Fisher, of the Ottawa-Hull 'Men's Forum Against Sexism', complains that the mythopoetic approach offers,

a structure for pulling out of traditional masculinity into 'never-never land'. Bly's strength, says Fisher, lies in bolstering low male self-esteem in a time when 'there's no good news for men; no sense of power and élan'. But Fisher is suspicious of the New Age cast of the mythopoetic thought and argues that 'Bly guys are unconscious. They are looking for the short cut to nirvana. They want to go from confusion to a graceful existence beyond doubt'.

(Simmons, 1992: n.p.)

Paul Wolf-Light argues that Bly's writing is full of contradictions and flaws and has undermined the current concept of men, masculinity and 'Menswork'. Even the name *Iron John*, he argues, evokes a 'dark and foreboding figure, armoured, inflexible and grim' (1994: n.p.). A mentor who is portrayed as 'authoritarian, autocratic, impersonal, contemptuous and violent' so, in reality, depicts the ethics and conduct of a patriarchal society. In fact, if Bly is attempting to present *Iron John* as an

alternative for the usual 'macho rational, rigid, unfeeling and destructive stereotypes' of masculinity, *Iron John* as a symbol seems incongruous (1994: n.p.). Furthermore, the concept that both parents can nurture a child seems alien to Bly. Indeed, while the parenting paradigm illustrated and recommended in *Iron John* would produce an intimacy with the mother and remoteness from fathers that Bly actually finds problematic, he seems unaware of the contradiction. Finally, Bly fails to discriminate between two different types of initiation while, at the same time, utilizing both in an inappropriate manner to support his thesis.²⁸ While the consequence of Bly's hypothesis may lead to maternal independence, the result is often passive dependence on the contemporaneous, cultural and stereotypical portrayal of men. This, some argue, has already occurred in the American men's movement, which has been influenced by Bly. It has resulted in a macho stereotyping and a misogynistic ethos within the guiding principles of the 'men's rights and gender segregation' movement (Wolf-Light, 1994: n.p.).

Bly's naivety is also illustrated in his attitude to myths and fairy tales in that he claims that the 'ancient stories' are helpful, since they are free of all 'modern psychological prejudices' (Wolf-Light, 1994: n.p.). However, incongruously, he ignores the fact that these tales are steeped in a particular historical and socio-political era as well as reflecting the prejudices of the author. Within *Iron John*, these stereotypes include the 'subordination of women, slavery, racism, religious intolerance, a strict hierarchical structure built on wealth and power together with the acceptance of violence, as a means to an end, especially through conflict' (Wolf-Light, 1994: n.p.). Indeed, Faludi contends that 'the true subject of Bly's weekends, after all, is not love and sex, but power...how to wrest it from women and how to mobilize it for men' (1991a: n.p.).

²⁸ The first, initiation that Bly commends, is the 'formal, traditional, collective and gendered initiation'. While this ritual ignores the boy's 'individual identity', it separates the boy from his mother while encouraging a 'socially defined and conforming identity'. The second type is a 'shamanic initiation'. This is not concerned with the 'socialising function of collective initiation' but is related to the individuals 'spiritual and psychological' evolution. Facilitated and controlled by the neophyte's personal dreams and visions, the separation involves not only mother and family but the 'very ground of his being'. While rare, the guidance is 'individual and spiritual' rather than 'collective and political' however; there is a danger that the initiation may end in psychosis. By combining both forms, Bly's is able to sanction his claim that a 'collective initiation' leads to 'independent individuals' (Wolf-Light, 1994: n.p.).

(i) Fox and the Hidden Spirituality of Men

Having considered the general depiction and perspective of the ‘men’s movement’, it seems that there is a similar belief system underlying the ideology and outworking of creation spirituality. Fox’s use of myth is diffused throughout his books. Whether the myths are African American, Celtic, Native American, or Jewish, they are deployed as stories of compassion, tales that inspire the artist in the construction of drama and ritual that cultivates a ‘collective imagination’ and enhance his own story of cosmology (1988a: 26).

Moreover, while postulating that all ‘postmodern political movements’ are the outcomes of shared tales that exalt humanity, while stimulating the imagination, Fox confirms the parallel between his use of myth and that used by the ‘women’s movement’ and subsequently the ‘men’s movement’ (Juline, 2000). Indeed, as Boulton asserts,

a minister wrote to me recently about a major change in his life. His involvement with the men’s movement had led him to experience intimacy in new and profound ways. The image of God in his everyday experience had shifted dramatically from a Being that exercises control and power “above” us to a compassionate Friend who longs for us and for the entire creation with love and gentleness. He is now finding God much more in public events and in relationships than in moments of separation. And he is reading everything that he can get his hands on written by the controversial Dominican priest and theologian Matthew Fox. (1991: 269)

Fox argues that the current models of spiritualities available to men pose a danger of feminization. Men’s ‘sacred dimension’ cries out for the reintroduction of a ‘sexual mysticism’. Men as well as women need liberating and awe and wonder are diminished by the loss of a ‘chthonic phallus’, an intimate relationship with the earth and the gods and spirits of the underworld (1988a: 177–80). This is the missing link that could only be redeemed by a return to native ritual drumming and dancing, especially in the form of ‘sacred male puberty rites’ mentored by mature men— suggestions that sound surprisingly analogous to a Pagan ritual. While the argument

may seem academic, Bly, in fact, participated with Fox in the ‘Vietnam Ritual to Mourn and Grieve’ with all its attendant symbolic ritual, while, at the same time, he has also contributed to the ‘Wednesday Forum’ at ICCS in his role as the guru of Eastern mysticism (1988a: 116, 146).

Clearly, while Bly and Fox have a deep concern for men’s wellbeing and spirituality, it is difficult to equate *Iron John*, which is filled with ‘fear, violence and hatred of women’ and misrepresents modernity, with the ethos of creation spirituality that Fox inherited from Chenu (Simmons, 1992: n.p.). We cannot resurrect fairy tales and imbue them with ‘poetic numinosity’ he argues. ‘They are not expressions of our age or of our current cultural myths’ (Dolce, 1993: n.p.). The mythopoetic movement appears almost ‘culpably dismissive of political, especially feminist, thought’. Moreover, while fairy tales may be aesthetically appealing they can be ‘powerful psychobabble full of a misogynistic certitude’ (Dolce, 1993: n.p.). While uncannily echoing Fox’s holistic feminist ethos Moyers (1999: n.p.) observes that *Iron John* is

more that an account of male initiation...it is also about the process of becoming more human...the restoration of humanity’s lost potential for wholeness. However, in a culture ruled by masculine values the task of necessity involves the restoration of the feminine to its rightful equal place beside the masculine.

If the connection between Bly and Fox seemed tenuous at first Fox made it explicit when he published *The Hidden Spirituality of Men*. It examines the men’s movement, the sacred masculine, and the Jungian archetypes from the green man to the spiritual warrior who inspire us to change the world. A Jungian analyst endorsed the book while Lerner, the editor of *Tikkun*, argued that it ‘combines the wisdom of the ages with the most forward-looking combination of feminist spirituality and contemporary psychological and philosophical reflections’ (Fox, 2008a: back cover).

6. Conclusion: The Basic Premises of Fox’s Theology

Two questions in the Introduction of his book *Original Blessing* provide an insight into Fox’s theology. First, ‘in our quest for wisdom and survival, do the human races require a new religious paradigm?’ Secondly, ‘does the creation-centered spiritual

tradition offer such a paradigm?’ Fox obviously replies affirmatively to both questions and subsequently places Christianity in a renewed context by returning it to what he believes to be its early roots, which he connects with creation (1983b: 9–11). Creation spirituality, he asserts, is based on ten concepts that enable people to recover their ‘mystical possibility’:

1. Everyone is a mystic.
2. Everyone is a prophet— i.e. a mystic in action.
3. The universe is a blessing— i.e. something we experience as good.
4. Human beings have to dig and work at finding their deep self, their true self, and their spirit-self.
5. The subsequent journey is a fourfold journey.
6. Everyone is an artist.
7. We relate to the universe—we are microcosm of the macrocosm.
8. We are all sons and daughters of God.
9. Divinity is as much mother as father, as much child as parent, as much Godhead (mystery) as God (history), as much beyond all being as in all things.
10. We experience the Divine in all things and all things are in the Divine (panentheism) and this mystical intuition supplants theism (and its child atheism) as an appropriate way to name our relation to the Divine. (Fox, 1997a: 285–86)

In Fox’s opinion, three crucial phenomena are compelling humanity to a change of ‘heart, symbols and structures’ (1999a: xv). First in order to extricate the Church from a Hellenistic influence, humanity has to engage once more with the Jewish values of the Hebrew Bible, compassion and social concern. Secondly, the rising of an all embracing ‘feminist consciousness’ call for the discarding of outdated patriarchal images in favour of new symbols and icons relevant to a modern mindset. Thirdly, the need for a comprehensive approach to the global environmental concern is exacerbated by the ‘brevity of time’ and the ecological evidence of a dying planet (1999b: xv, 26).

Creation spirituality has no organizational affiliation. It is a movement in the mode of liberation theology and one of the many strands that have arisen in recent years. Fox describes himself as a panentheist, in that panentheism, he argues,

is the way the creation centered tradition of spirituality experiences God. It is not theistic because it does not relate to God as subject or object, but neither is it pantheistic. Panentheism is a way of seeing the world sacramentally...pantheism has no need of sacraments, but panentheism does. For while everything is truly in God and God is truly in everything...the sacramental consciousness of panentheism develops into transparent and diaphanous consciousness wherein we can see events and beings as divine. (1983b: 90)

As Philip Clayton remarks, despite the variety, there are discernible trends within panentheistic theology (2004: 249) and in the next chapter I will examine the principal critiques of Fox's theology and his quest for an authentic mysticism.

Chapter 3

In Search of Mysticism

1. Introduction

The Anglican Church Information Office received the following request from a young schoolgirl: ‘we are doing God next year: Please send all details and pamphlets’ (Packer, 1982: 126). Facing the diversity of concepts of the divine, one can empathize with her plea. As Athenagoras I (1964), succinctly observed, in a meeting with Pope Paul VI to discuss their mutual historical estrangement ‘there is only one theology but there are many theologians’.¹ While doctrine in its broadest sense refers to the whole corpus of teaching, in its narrower sense, it describes what individuals believe about ‘aspects of their faith’. Who decides what correct teaching is? (Guthrie, 1983: 162).

If the doctrine of God was a source of controversy in the Early Church, it continues to be scrutinized and challenged on all sides by philosophers, theologians and scientists. Furthermore, as Matthew Fox points out in *One River Many Wells*, all faiths have theologies that articulate, in some form, a doctrine of an absolute being.

Once we return to the depth the core of religion we find much more than dogmas, concepts, institutions, commands. We find a striving for experience of the Divine, however that can be spoken of, we find both form and formlessness, male and female, experience and practise.
(2001b: 2)

Fox argues that spirituality is not religion. Religion is restrictive, while spirituality is a way of life a ‘way of living in today’s world’ (1978a: n.p.). Fox responded to this caveat by rejecting Augustine and almost two millennia of theological thought. This rejection of Augustine, in Boulton’s opinion, was catastrophic and a decision that directed Fox’s thought towards the mystics and creation spirituality, and towards the recasting of mystical theology and contexts (1990: n.p.). Therefore, I will begin by examining Fox’s

¹ The 268th Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople from 1948 to 1972.

concerns with Augustine. Following this, is a survey of the various theologians who have critically responded to Fox's prolific output. This will be followed by an examination of the critiques of Simon Tugwell and Barbara Newman, focusing particularly on their assessment of Fox's use of Meister Eckhart and Hildegard of Bingen, and his development of the four paths of creation spirituality.

2. Augustine Abandoned

In response to what he perceived as the spiritual breakdown of American culture, Fox wrote *Prayer: A Radical Response to Life* (2001a) in which he advocated an amalgamation of mysticism, prophecy, spiritual experience and social justice. This spirituality was to be far removed from its ascetic past. It was active, animated and anchored in the physical world (Osborn: 1994: n.p.). With this in mind, Fox wrote *Whee! We, Wee* and, quoting Chenu, he remarks, 'Augustine was a temporary victim of Manicheism' (1981a: 19). Moreover, his whole life, according to Fox, was coloured by an unusually sad experience of uncontrolled passion. Even so, the seed had been planted and while the above recognizes Augustine's thorn in the flesh, Fox's *cri de coeur* continued. Meantime, his antipathy to Augustine hardened and developed and for Fox, Protestant misconceptions include the notion,

that Augustine was the first (or the last) word in spirituality. While not decrying the stature of Augustine and the immensity of his thought, I do regret his influence. It is due to him, above all, that the albatross of Neoplatonism still weighs so heavily about our necks. His dualistic psychology should be seen for what it is: a put-down of the "inferior" human activities of the body, time and multiplicity by the "superior" activities of intellect, will and memory... (1978a: n.p.)

Nonetheless, for Fox, the Church needs transformation and renewal, rather than a reformation, a radical mystical awakening that reverts to Jewish spirituality and a rejection of Augustine's 'psychologizing of love' that has influenced Western theology (1978a: n.p.). Augustinian monotheism has, Fox argues, erected a God that appeals to 'Western philosophers, academics and churches' and it is a concept that alienates people

from the experience of the ‘everywhere God’ who belongs to everyone (1981a: 120). Indeed, he argued that, to believe otherwise is to be a heretic.

Focusing on Augustine’s work, Fox has variously redefined the Trinity in the following terms:

a living cosmology, the holy Trinity of science (knowledge of creation), mysticism (experiential union with creation and its unnameable mysteries), and art (expression of our awe at creation) is what constitutes a living cosmology (1988a: 78) or as a Holy Trinity of Cosmology, Liberation, and Wisdom. (1991a: 55, 56, 64)

In 1993, he translated and produced commentaries of Eckhart’s German and Latin texts and his treatise on Eckhart became the catalyst for all that followed in *Original Blessing* and *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. Furthermore, by the mid-1970s, all the components of Fox’s panentheistic creation-centred spirituality had been formulated. It eventually emerged, fully developed, in *Meditations with Meister Eckhart* (Osborn, 1994: n.p.).

The publication of *Original Blessing* revealed Fox’s conceptual immanentist shift, and this became the new paradigm that, he believed, would go some way towards curing the ills of the modern world. Hence, any examination of Fox has to begin with his reaction against what he perceived to be the poverty of Western spirituality, with its defective understanding of the cosmos. Fox continues to reject Augustine’s Fall-redemption theology, dualism and the doctrine of original sin which, he argues, fosters ‘rationalism, individualism, anthropocentrism, reductionism and determinism’ (Osborn, 1994: n.p.).

Augustine understood evil in terms of the privation of good (1964: 65). Everything is good, given that its creator is good. However, being created, the goodness of creation is mitigated and subject to primordial corruption. For him, for good to be diminished is evil. As Margaret Atkins argues, Augustine eventually created his own original blessing in his reflections on Genesis. As each day of creation ended, God saw that it was good, and this thought became the central theme of Augustine’s theology and his ‘profound

meditation on what it means to be created' (1992: 500), an idea which, in turn, wove itself into the Christian tradition. Whereas, for Plotinus, the whole is beautiful, even if the part is not, for Augustine, who clearly avoids 'holism' per se, each individual part is good.

While there is perhaps some debate in the area of Augustine's relationship to Platonism, arguably, in his desire to undermine the Manichean emphasis on metaphysical elements, Augustine resorted to a third strand of Greek thought Platonism. Concluding that, if 'matter had been made by God from nothing' then even 'matter must be good' (Atkins, 1992: 501; see also Menn, 2002: 82; Stump and Kretzmann, 2001: 73). Nonetheless, while holding firmly to a transcendent theology, Augustine remained conscious of the 'dependence of all creatures on the Creator' (Atkins, 1992: 501). Thus, in the *City of God*, he writes:

We can, to be sure, never give him adequate thanks for our existence, our life, our sight of sky and earth, or our possession of intelligence and reason, which enable us to search for him who created all these things. But there is more than this. When we were overwhelmed by the load of our sins, even then he did not abandon us He sent us his word, who is his only son...In view of all that, what heart or what tongue could claim to be competent to give him thanks? (1987: Book, VII: 31)

This appreciation led him to offer gratitude and praise to the all-sustaining God. This is an insight shared by Fox. Augustine's 'view of the created order is far from being "anthropocentric" or "dualist", he is thoroughly theocentric and steeped in the recognition of the goodness of all created things and their dependence on the Creator' (Atkins, 1992: 504). Atkins pithily observes that Fox, owing to his distortion of Augustine's thinking, seems to have misread the Dominican instruction manual. In fact, at times, it seems that he has lost it. Augustine's teaching about gratitude, may seem intense when compared with Fox, but, as Atkins observes, 'early fifth-century Hippo was a harsher place than late twentieth-century California' (1992: 504).

Gillian McCulloch, in her analysis of Fox, also agrees that he appears to have misunderstood Augustine's theology of evil. Moreover, to single out dualism as the genesis of sin merely creates a scapegoat (2002: 190–94). Indeed, Fox argues that the problems facing Western societies are rooted in Augustine's dualism and his fixation with the fall, which led to a defective view of the cosmos and a neglect of creation. Therefore, Fox chooses to redefine the fall, arguing that human nature was sinless from the beginning. Osborn finds it hard to accept that Fox actually believes that all the ills of the modern world can be attributed to Augustine's faulty theology. Furthermore, he argues, even if we trace Augustine's supposed errors back to Plato and beyond the 'emergence of patriarchy', Fox surely cannot believe in paradisiacal innocence and a Garden of Eden. Indeed, to suggest that 'dualism is the root of evil seems to credit human ideas with far too much power' (1994: n.p.).

Fox argues that the Fall-redemption hypothesis put forward by Augustine was based on a misreading of the situation. Augustine's hypothesis was wrong and such faulty theology needs correcting. To this end, Fox turns to Judaism and mysticism and produces a new vision that defines 'salvation as holism, as making whole, making one, and therefore making healthy, holy, and happy' (1984a: 88). Moreover, he argues, if we remove Augustine's preoccupation with self out of the equation and turn our attention to creation, it will also provide us with the 'necessary corrective to dualism and separation' as well as contribute to a holistic theology of healing (1984a: 88). Having said that, because of his emphasis on interconnectedness, Fox understands 'everything as being related to everything else' and, in Osborn's opinion, this is why conservative theologians such as Robert Brow classify Fox as a monist (1994: n.p.).

Nonetheless, Fox continues to insist on a 'dialectical approach to reality' and, as Starhawk explains in support of him, 'faced with deciding which is prior, the one or the many, Fox would want to say "both", all things are one, yet each is separate, individual and unique' (1989: 39). Having said that, it is perhaps worth noting that a more conventional Eastern Orthodox theology has much in common with Fox's holistic outlook while maintaining an 'ontological gulf between Creator and created' (Osborn, 1994: n.p.).

However, Fox's suggestion that salvation may be achieved by what amounts to a change in outlook has much in common with so-called Gnosticism's hypothesis that esoteric knowledge enabled the redemption of the human spirit. Nonetheless, while the Church Fathers and Augustine rejected Gnosticism, it was not because of dualism. Evil affects more than our understanding, while knowledge of good conduct, in and of itself, does not ensure it (Osborn, 1994: n.p.). Wayne Bolton argues that 'Fox throws out too much. There is an insular quality to Fox's Catholicism; it is as if the Reformation never took place and, though he rejects Augustine on every other page, one is never certain of the quality of Fox's encounter with the North African' (1991: 277). As Boulton argues, much of what follows stems from Fox's catastrophic rejection of Augustine, therefore, we will now turn our attention to the academic analysis of Fox's theology.

3. A Scholarly Analysis of Matthew Fox's Spirituality

(a) On the Cusp of the New Age

Having moved on from his debacle with the Catholic Church, Fox continues to court controversy and even now, Penn argues that as a Episcopalian, he is identified with the New Age Movement's potpourri of ideas (2005: 37, 146). Likewise, from within the Catholic tradition, because he draws on the work of, for example, Fritjof Capra, Buckminster Fuller, and Gregory Bateson, Mitch Pacwa discerns pantheistic elements and a tendency towards New Age thinking in Fox's writing (1992b: 182). Even so, while being an unabashed syncretist, Fox categorically rejects New Age pseudo-mysticism as

all space and no time; all consciousness and no conscience; all mysticism and no prophecy; all past life experiences, angelic encounters, untold bliss, and no critique of injustice or acknowledgment of the suffering and death that the toll of time takes. In short, no body. To these movements the Cosmic Christ says, 'Enter time. Behold my wounds. Love your neighbor. Set the captives free'. (1988a: 141)

Having said that, Fox acknowledges that, despite his misgivings, the current mystical New Age movement, can also ‘dialogue and create with the creation spiritual tradition’ as can the prepatriarchal religions, American and Celtic Spiritualities and the matricentric focus reclaimed by Starhawk and other Wiccan practitioners (1983b: 16). Richard Bauckham identifies characteristics that Fox shares with the New Age (1996: 115–26), while Jochen Scherer understands Fox’s thought as an example of the overlap between Christianity and the New Age (2002: 52ff.).

Pacwa, however, argues that this syncretism, introduced by Fox and ‘Starhawk the Witch’, has infiltrated the Catholic Church in America and introduced New Age concepts under the aegis of a ‘pseudo-Catholic sanction’ (1992b: 183). Apparently, several nuns have embraced Wiccan concepts and incorporated them into their celebrations. For example, the Franciscan Federation annual conference for women ‘religious superiors’ was inaugurated by a woman, dressed in native garb, who proceeded to ‘invoke the spirits of the north...east, south and west’, a ritual that Pacwa correctly identifies with the ‘opening rite of a Wicca ceremony’ (1992b: 183). As Graham Harvey writes of contemporary Wiccan ritual, the ‘four cardinal directions (east, south, west north...) are greeted or invoked’ according to the tradition and preference of the practitioners (1997: 44). Similar unconventional incidents were reported in the ‘San Francisco Faith, Lay Catholic Newspaper’,² which has links to the University of Creation Spirituality (Neumayr, 1997: n.p.). These allegations are substantiated by Starhawk who claimed the following in an official Wiccan circular:³

Teaching ritual and the history of the Goddess religion to priests, ministers, nuns and Christian educators was a new experience but deeply rewarding. I found the students very open to new ideas, hungry for new forms of ritual and very creative... I am very glad to discover such a strong movement within Christian churches that is sympathetic to the Pagan Spirit and willing to learn from the teachings of the Old Religion [witchcraft]. (Starhawk in O’Brien, 2004)

² Now the ‘California Catholic Daily’.

³ See *Circle Network News*, 1983, originally a newspaper now a magazine for Pagans.

In 1985, Rosemary Radford Ruether directed the 'Women's Ordination Conference' on 'Women and Spirituality', and according to Donna Steichen, most of the rituals involved were taken from Starhawk's books (1991: 34, 37). This attracted a multi-faith audience, including practitioners of Wicca and other exponents of extreme feminist views. Apparently, during the proceedings, Catholic religious practitioners openly denounced the Church, demanded ordination and a more 'inclusive liturgical language' that incorporated 'neo-pagan ritual magic' (1991: 29). Fox has also inaugurated a Pagan 'mystical stew' at the Institute for Culture and Creation Spirituality (ICCS). Sufi dances for peace are combined with intonations, such as 'I am the One I love; there is but one, One in All. All in One.' A similar liturgy was used at St John the Divine Church in New York. It was adapted from a service introduced by Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, the renowned Sufi master and mystic. Unsurprisingly, this development has scandalized orthodox Catholics (1991: 235).

Nonetheless, the Jesuit priest Mitchell Pacwa has argued that many Catholics are being drawn into a variety of alternative esoteric beliefs because of the malign influence of the New Age movement, the psychology of Jung and, specifically, Fox's writing and teaching, which continues to have a significant influence (1992a: n.p.). It would, therefore, be helpful to examine the catholic response to Fox's theology as articulated in the work of two Jesuit theologians. I have chosen to focus on both these thinkers, because, Pacwa takes a negative view of Fox's work while John Saliba is more positive and generous in his approach. While not only are both familiar with Fox, but both have a good understanding of the New Age context, particularly Saliba, who, as a scholar of religion, focuses on contemporary new religions and alternative spiritualities.

(b) A Survey of the Catholic Response to Fox's Theology

Arguing that the theological trajectory of Fox's thought has its roots in his rejection of Augustine, Pacwa argues that he is, in effect, proposing a new paradigm, which draws its inspiration from New Age concepts. Primarily, Pacwa critiques Fox's scholarship, world view and theology. Fox's scholarship, Pacwa argues, is embarrassing and shoddy. Moreover, he has betrayed Chenu and 'cast a shadow' over catholic scholarship, since

he has deceived all ‘non-specialists’ who unavoidably, have to trust the veracity and opinions of academics (1992: 174).

Since Pacwa’s area of expertise is ‘Scripture’, he exposes Fox’s mistranslation of Biblical texts and his poor linguistics. Fox, he argues, ‘mixes and matches etymologies...to make a feminist point’ that is not in the original text (1992: 174). Fox in a similar vein to the New Age is seeking a paradigm shift towards a Einsteinian world that is interconnected, mystical, maternal, silent and dark, with a cosmic dimension of reality. This cosmic shift, Pacwa argues, is coupled with a matrifocal emphasis, common to New Age concepts, even though Fox explicitly rejects New Age pseudomysticism (1992: 175–76). Furthermore, Pacwa argues, Fox is not critical enough of the New Age, because he embraces what some would perceive as occult practices such as shamanism, Wiccan rites and specifically Starhawk, and astrology as ascribed by Jung (1992: 175–76).

Similarly, John Saliba focuses on Fox, acknowledging that he is the most ‘controversial figure’ in any Catholic debate relating to the New Age and capable of polarizing opinions with his high public profile, prolific writing and continued confrontation with the Catholic Church (1999: 167). Yet, as Saliba acknowledges, Fox cannot be completely associated with the New Age. While some of the ancient so-called Gnostic concepts have been linked with the movement this critique can hardly be applied to Fox since his view of nature differs with a Gnostic understanding (1999: 168).

John Saliba, in his analysis of Christian responses to the New Age, argues that the exclusivist rejection of the New Age might be a rather ‘hasty judgement’, in that it prohibits any further dialogue (1999: 124). In other words, the notion that the New Age is inherently ‘Gnostic’ and thus, ‘evil and anti-Christian’ (1999: 126) is too blinkered. In this sense, Fox does have something to offer to the Church, in that his theologizing is explicitly open to truth, wherever it may be found. Indeed, Saliba argues, this intolerant perspective has impacted on those writers who are arbitrarily and unthinkingly identified as New Age. There is, for example, inherent resistance to the mystical writings of Teilhard de Chardin and Bede Griffiths, as well as those of Fox however, having said

that, an intelligent examination of their work would expose discontinuities that would thwart any common classification (Saliba, 1999: 126).

Again, while there are those who have criticized Fox's panentheism (Brearley, 1992; Osborn 1994, 1995; Cooper 2007), a theology he explicitly articulates, Pacwa argues that panentheism is actually found in the 'late Neo-Platonism of the Middle Ages' and is represented in the thought of 'John Erigena, Nicholas of Cusa and Meister Eckhart' (1992a). The problem is that, none of them were orthodox Catholic theologians, in that 'all three philosophers came under church scrutiny and condemnation' because of their 'explicit claims of panentheism' which, in his opinion, conceals an 'implicit pantheism' (1992a). Fox quotes Eckhart habitually and Pacwa cites two quotations specifically:

The seed of God is in us.... Now the seed of a pear tree
grows into a pear tree, a hazel seed into a hazel tree,
the seed of God into God. (1988a: 121)

I discover that God and I are one. There I am what I was,
and I grow neither smaller nor bigger, for there I am an
immovable cause that moves all things. (1988a: 154)

and another quotation from Cusa which Fox used in *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (1988a: 126):

the absolute, Divine Mind is all that is in everything that is... Divinity
is the enfolding and unfolding of everything that is. Divinity is in all
things in such a way that all things are in divinity... We are, as it were,
a human deity. Humans are also the universe, but not absolutely since
we are human. Humanity is therefore a microcosm, or in truth, a
human universe. Thus, humanity itself encloses both God and the
universe in its human power. (Yockey, 1987: 28)

These quotations illustrate the problem. Pacwa's argument is that Fox has the same problem as Eckhart and Cusa. They may claim that their thoughts are panentheistic, but

they sound like pantheists. For Pacwa, Fox's writing fosters an understanding of divinity that is far removed from traditional Catholic teaching and furthermore, Pacwa argues, The New Ages' central element is pantheistic. Moreover, having analysed Fox's teaching on God and Christ, he concludes that Fox has moved away from panentheism, he is a pantheistic New Ager.

Pacwa openly admits his previous involvement with drugs, Jungian psychology, astrology and everything else that he now argues against in relation to the New Age. However, even though he locates the New Age in the 'counter culture of the 1960s, Eastern religion, Western occultism, modern science and human psychology' all prevalent in Fox's writings, at times Pacwa's argument almost bears comparison to Constance Cumbey's fundamentalist Christian denunciation of the movement (1992a).⁴ Pacwa's response to Fox is all encompassing he allows no room for intellectual or constructive dialogue and, in a more balanced critique, Saliba argues, that Fox's approach may well be a change in direction rather than a denial of traditional doctrine.

(c) A Survey of the Protestant Response to Fox's Thought

Within Protestant critique, Fox is also accused of practising a vague form of pantheism, a 'hardcore New Age philosophy with a liberal Catholic gloss' (Miller, 1990: 188). Following a brief overview, others, argue that Fox, while sounding New Age is simply 'slipping into pantheism' (Newport, 1998: 126; see also Osborn, 1994: n.p.; Peters in Newport, 1991: 125–26; 128–30). Writing from an evangelical perspective Ron Rhodes argues that Fox disregards Jesus' uniqueness while imposing New Age interpretations on biblical texts (1990: 190–91; see also Rhodes and Gomes, 1995: 35, 79).

While Gillian McCulloch, in her analysis of Fox, recognizes his 'dualophobic perspective', Fox, she argues, assumes a 'New Age (as opposed to Pagan)' interpretation of sin because he equates, fallen human behaviour to a 'particular type of consciousness that is dualistic or Piscean thinking' inherited from Augustine (2002: 191). Gillian Paschkes-Bell's in her thesis sought to establish the common ground

⁴ See *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow* (1983).

between Christian theology, and the 'new awareness'. Having surveyed the available literature, she then interviewed twelve people from Findhorn and twelve church-going Christians. Subsequently, she concludes that 'if the new awareness is a way of thinking about things that can be applied to whatever position an individual already holds, it is possible for an individual to be a New Age Christian' (1998: 4, 50).

Paul Heelas, examining the extent of the New Age's infiltration into Western culture, argues that,

there are three spectra which link broader cultural formations with the New Age, one runs from mainstream healing, through forms of alternative medicine which do not refer to the spiritual, to the idea that the Self can heal itself. Another begins with conservative, highly theistic Christianity, this then giving way to more Pelagian, immanentist and perennialized forms of Christianity (as with many Quakers, for example), this in turn imperceptibly becoming New Age. (1996: 116)

While the New Age movement has, what Heelas terms, a capitalist, 'prosperity wing', the same concept is to be found within charismatic and Pentecostal Protestantism. Similarly, focusing on healing and health, society, Heelas argues, has embraced mind improvement techniques, alternative therapies and human potential ideas. While the majority of these ideas and practices need not necessarily be New Age, from a cultural point of view, 'many...to a varying degree, *approximate* to it' (1996: 117). My point is that, many of these ideas and concepts are to be found in Fox's thought and, if, by 'Pelagian' (which is admittedly used rather loosely here of a contemporary trend, rather than of a particular early Christian theology), Heelas is referring to the broad notion of salvation by effort, rather than what might be continuous with an Augustinian notion of 'grace', then, I would argue, Fox too might be considered Pelagian.

(d) *The Pagan Adoption of Fox*

C. S. Lewis once argued that the 'Pantheist's God does nothing, demands nothing. He is there if you wish for Him, like a book on a shelf. He will not pursue you' (1978: 93). This, obviously, is a crude, wilful and conspicuously Christian misunderstanding of pantheism, since, for a start, one cannot use personal categories of pantheist conceptions of deity. To engage in such biased comparative theology is bound to, as it was intended to, lead to a derogatory view of the 'other' religion/theology. (This, of course, is the problem with many critiques of Fox, as it is with many of Fox's own critiques of the Christian tradition.) Pantheism identifies deity with reality. It is interesting, therefore, that Fox has been identified as a pantheist, since he does not make this identification. Deity and reality are, conceptually, distinct. This is the principal difference between pantheism and panentheism.

Having made that point, in this section, I want to explore why many Pagans or, what we might term, nature religionists, have found inspiration in Fox's discussions of nature and deity (e.g. Starhawk, 1995–2003; see also Nichols, 1997; Couch, 2006.). Pagans often do not make the distinction between pantheism and panentheism either, but understand Fox's work as offering important insights for their traditions.

Interestingly, Peregrin Wildoak (1992: n.p.) suggests that Fox's four paths would enhance the Wicca degree system already in existence with the addition of a fourth degree. He aligns the first Wiccan degree, associated with the element of Air, to the *Via Positiva*, while the second Wiccan degree, associated with the element of water and 'sealed by the legend of the descent of the Goddess', resonates with the *Via Negativa*. The third Wiccan degree, which is associated with the element of fire, symbolizes the new dawn and the creativity born of the union of priestess and priest working 'the great rite', becomes the *Via Creativa*. Fox's fourth path, the *Via Transformativa*, while not ritualized in Wicca, would become the fourth degree, under this new hypothesis. This development, Wildoak argues, would broaden and correct Wicca's perspective as social justice becomes embodied in the fourth element of earth.

Paul Harrison's chart (see next page) categorizes Aquinas, Eckhart and Hildegard, three of Fox's favourite dualistic and world-rejecting thinkers, who view the body, the senses and matter as inferior while holding the belief that full unity may only be attained after death. Meanwhile, Harrison, defines Fox as a dualistic, world-affirming panentheist who understands God as present in the material world while transcending it in time and space. Nonetheless, in his book he argues that 'Creation Spirituality reinterprets Christian words and symbols in a highly pantheistic way (though Fox claims to be a panentheist rather than a pantheist)' (Harrison, 2004: 95).

Panentheism identifies the divine with the universe, or regards material reality as a manifestation of deity. However, while Harrison defines Pantheism as a belief system that reveres the 'universe' as an 'unified whole' (2004:35), there are a variety of alternative pantheistic and panentheistic expressions, which range from basic nature religions to highly sophisticated forms of philosophical theology. Coupled with the issue of Fox's New Age Pagan credentials, Robert Brow's analysis places him within monism. Hence, in the subsequent section we will examine Robert Brow's analysis of Fox's work.

(e) Robert Brow and Vedantic Monism

In his attempt to abolish the dichotomy of body and mind, Christian Wolff proposed that ultimate reality was composed entirely of one substance. Thus, monism denies the existence of a distinction or duality, such as that between matter and mind or God and the world. For example, Spinoza (1632–1677), the monistic Jewish philosopher espoused the idea that 'God or nature' was a single infinite substance, with mind and matter being two incommensurable ways of conceiving the one reality (Sundberg, 2000: 526–27).

Moreover, Robert Brow argued, while 'evangelical eyebrows...rise at Fox's ideas about same-and opposite-sex lovemaking, phallus worship, sweat lodges, pow-wow dances, and pipe ceremonies' (1989: n.p.), these esoteric excursions are only superficial. Christians, Brow argues, should examine more closely what Fox is actually proposing—the problems lie deeper.

World-affirming Pantheisms		
<i>Type of Pantheism</i>	<i>Central Beliefs</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Nature-worship	Non-systematic: Nature evokes religious feelings of awe and belonging. May include specific divinities.	Romantic Pets Rousseau Wiccan Paganism
Strict pantheism	Monistic: The material cosmos is divine. There is no cosmic soul.	Heraclitus Chuang Tzu Chang Tsai Thich Nhat Hanh Scientific pantheism
Panpsychic pantheism	Monistic: The material cosmos is divine. There is a cosmic soul, which is of the same substance as matter.	Zeno of Cittium Marcus Aurelius Teilhard de Chardin Einstein Gene Roddenberry
World-affirming panentheism	Dualistic: God is present in the material world but also transcends it in time and space.	Ibn Al' Arabi Attar The Free Spirit Spinoza Matthew Fox
World-denying Pantheisms		
World-rejecting panentheism	Dualistic: The cosmos is made of matter and soul. The body, the senses and matter are inferior. The soul must rise above the body to attain union with God, or can attain full unity only after death.	Paul and John Gnostics Plotinus Meister Eckhart Aquinas Hildegard of Bingen Jakob Boehme
World-negating pantheisms	Dualistic: The material world is an illusion. There is only one, spiritual reality.	Parmenides Upanishads Mahayana Buddhism Ralph Waldo Emerson

Fig. 1 (in Harrison, 1996: n.p.)

The issue is monism or Fox's non-dualism which holds that reality consists of a single basic substance or element while denying a Creator above and separate from his creation (1989: n.p.). Brow is convinced that Fox's new paradigm presupposes that 'only one eternal principle exists in the universe' (1989: n.p.). Brow utilizes the four classifications of Hindu pantheism and monism as illustrated in the following chart in an attempt to categorize Fox (1996: Chapter 9: n.p.).

Pantheism	<i>Absolute Pantheism</i>	Everything there is, is God.
	<i>Modified Pantheism</i>	God is the reality or principle behind nature.
Vedanta	<i>Modified Monism</i>	God is to nature as soul is to body.
	<i>Absolute Monism</i>	Only God is reality. All else is imagination.

Fig. 2 (in Brow, 1996: n.p.)

Brow argues that, central to any discussion of creation spirituality, there are two very different ways of picturing the world and our place in it namely theism and monism. Moreover, while Fox proposes four paths within his creation spirituality, Brow also proffers four paths that we may consider if Fox is to be classified as a monist.

Absolute Pantheism, Brow's first category, asserts that God is everything and everything is God, therefore God becomes an impersonal being identified with the world. Problematically, the distinction between good and evil is removed, and this leads to a

moral relativism and a denial of ethical absolutes. Fox's moral stance, although his harmatology is poor, eliminates him from this category (1989: n.p.).

Modified Pantheism, Brow's second category, understands God as the 'life force that energizes our world', not the 'whole of nature, but the principle behind nature' (1989: n.p.). Observing what is 'good and creative' lends to the universe an underlying morality that allows for an ethical perspective that can distinguish 'good from evil'. Thus, an 'in-built principle of justice', coupled with a belief in evolutionary progress and a concern for Mother Earth is common within modified pantheism. While this description certainly applies to Fox, the concept of a 'life force' negates a 'personal' dimension and Fox with his concept of compassion and justice, gratitude and thanksgiving seem to be groping towards a more personalist spirituality (1989: n.p.).

Absolute monism or non-dualism, Brow's third category, holds that the 'only reality is God, and this world is imagination (*maya*)'—a 'dream world of our own making...an illusion', where the 'absolute' is remote and impersonal. In the Upanishads, for example, liberation consists in 'merging with the absolute like a drop of water in an ocean'. As Brow observes, 'Fox is not an absolute monist. The concept of people having fun together is too important to him' (1989: n.p.).

Modified or qualified monism, Brow's final hypothesis, is the 'philosophical position which lies between Pantheism and Shankara's extreme Illusionism... In it God is related to the reality around us as the soul is to the human body'. This worldview no longer identifies God with evil and while it recognizes the reality of a spiritual dimension, it allows for the 'ascription of personality to God, since God is the World Soul' (1989: n.p.).

Like the soul of man, God is visualized as having intelligence, thought and moral character, which is why he requires moral qualities in his worshippers. As regards creation, Ramanuja makes God both the creator and Soul of the world. Creation is not by a supra-natural God, but by emanation as a form of creative evolution. (Brow, 1996: n.p.)

Monism, Brow argues, merges the individual with the whole, while Christianity preserves human individuality and personality. Within Monism,

sin is at the most an ignorance of the principle, or soul, or nature of the cosmos. Christian Theism however makes sin a personal revolt, an act of disobedience or hostility against a personal God. As a result Theism requires repentance, whereas Monism advises illumination to understand... Monism suggests the need for union with nature, or the principle behind nature, or the World Soul... Monism views Christ as part and parcel of this universe...its principle or World Soul while Christians call him the Son of God the incarnate redeemer. (1989: n.p.)

Nonetheless, Allan Galloway on the other hand argues that,

the cross at its heart as witnessing to the terrible reality of evil makes Cosmic Monism impossible. The assertion of the absolute sovereignty of God excludes any ultimate dualism. The principle of the Incarnation makes any form of acosmism impossible. The answer, which Christianity gives to the ontological question, is to be understood in terms of the doctrine of Incarnation. (1951: 3–4)

The point is that many of the arguments in Fox's work make sense in terms of such monism. Moreover, in the face of 'Fox's claim that Jesus was a nondualist, and not a theist, it should be easy to see that the Bible is not a monistic book, nor is the God who was in Christ a monistic deity' (Brow, 1989). Therefore, Brow claims that Fox is teaching a form of modified monism more akin to the Indian religious tradition than to Christianity. In other words, God in Fox's thinking is 'related to the reality around us as the soul is to the human body' (1989).

While Brow makes some worthwhile points, there are flaws in his assessment. It is clear that Fox does not reject transcendence and is explicit in his rejection of pantheism. This is again, as noted at the outset, another example of a crude misunderstanding of the difference between pantheism and panentheism. Fox, has made it clear that he has sought

to develop a panentheism theology because pantheism ‘robs God of transcendence, states that “everything is God and God is everything”’ (1983b: 90). Panentheism, in contrast, argues Fox, is ‘orthodox and fit for orthopraxis as well, for it slips in the little Greek word *en* and thus means, “God is in everything and everything is in God” and panentheism is a way of seeing the world sacramentally’ (1983b: 90).

(f) Critiques of Fox’s Panentheism

Even a cursory appraisal will reveal the controversy that has surrounded the panentheistic ecumenical ethos within Grace Cathedral California. Bishop William Swing, who nurtured Fox within the Anglican Communion, has encouraged an ethos that has attracted the attention of the media, and the critique of the Evangelical community and Catholic Church (Ferreira, 1997: 135–45; see also Lattin, 1995: A–1).

Swing, was a ‘low key liberal’ until his consecration of Fox and the launching of United Religions Initiative (URI) gave him a higher profile. ‘Most bishops, just think I’m nuts or an infidel or a heretic’, he remarked (Penn, 2004: 18, 140). Nonetheless, the 1998 Lambeth conference under Carey, endorsed the URI’s call for a global religious cease-fire, despite antipathy from some bishops and critique in the Church of England newspaper (Penn, 2004: 18, 140). Swing remarked, ‘I get tarred and feathered by a lot of people...most see their job as defending the faith, not pursuing global good on behalf of all faiths’, but ‘there is an emerging sense of urgency at Lambeth for the need of URI’ (Barnwell, 1998: 1).

In her review of Fox’s Cosmic Christ hypothesis, Margaret Brearley asserts that he has constructed a myth and is espousing a form of panentheistic Pagan cosmic consciousness (1992: 43–48). Lawrence Osborn, argues, that Fox’s panentheism is reminiscent of the emanationist imagery used by Hildegard of Bingen (1994: n.p.) and as Christopher Partridge argues there is a fundamental ‘theistic reluctance to identify God and the world within Fox’s mystical immanence’ (2004: 75).

John Cooper places Fox firmly in the panentheistic tradition of Teilhard de Chardin with his related theologies of a world-soul, a global community, the Cosmic Christ and

panentheistic mysticism (2007: 297–300). He notes, perceptively I think, that Fox’s intended audience is the ‘secure and affluent’ while his interests are actually located with the poor and oppressed in the ‘spiritual and practical’ (2007: 299). Since Fox’s interests are with spirituality and practice, not philosophy, Cooper argues, that while he reiterates a basic definition of panentheism, he does not fully develop it beyond asserting “all things in God and God in all things” (2007: 299; see also Fox, 1988a: 57).

In other words, Fox’s pastoral and applied theological concerns have led to a philosophically weak theology. Clearly, while this is, in my opinion, a valid explanation for the weaknesses in his theological work, it is not an excuse. Applied theology, of course, need not and, indeed, should not, be theoretically weak. Similar criticisms could be made of Fox’s conversation partners, notably Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme. While all three were influenced by Teilhard de Chardin’s work, they have each proved to be popularizers, rather than careful interpreters. As such, this has led to significant misunderstanding of their own work, particularly Fox who seeks to contribute to serious theology, yet seems unable to articulate basic categories clearly and cogently. Having examined the broad range of academic critique on Fox’s teaching we will now examine, Simon Tugwell’s review of *Breakthrough (Passion for Creation)* and Barbara Newman’s review of Fox’s scholarship on Hildegard of Bingen.

4. *The Speculative Mysticism of the Rhineland Mystics*

The Rhineland Mystics were a group of fourteenth-century German mystics and the movement’s main representative, according to Fox, is Meister Eckhart. Fox sees this mystical tradition as part of the Christian heritage and, while he quotes from Thomas Aquinas, he draws largely on the Rhineland mystics, whom he describes as ‘champions of an ecological spiritual consciousness’ (1984a: 86). These include Mechtild of Magdburg (1210–1290), and Julian of Norwich (1342–c.1415) the English anchoress and mystic. However, his principal influences are Eckhart (c.1260–1327) and Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), both of whom are the subject of a specific academic critique, which we will examine next.

(a) Matthew Fox's Interpretation of Meister Eckhart

According to Bernard McGinn (1997: 11), Eckhart's public teaching that 'perfection was possible from within the secular realm' was 'radical' and 'offensive' to many who heard him. Nonetheless, Fox draws on Eckhart to support his rejection of dualism and the spirituality that is based on the awe of Creation and Creativity. Eckhart's pathway and that of the creation tradition is a 'wayless way'. 'It demands no gurus, no fanciful methods, no protracted exercises or retreats', it is available to all, and the person 'who has found this way needs no other' (1983a: 6).

Ignoring a mystical or rapturous approach to mysticism, Eckhart 'viewed the ordinary' through a new lens. His mysticism was located in the world and, while maintaining a sharp distinction between God and creature, Eckhart's dialectic approach attempted to merge both a transcendent and immanent determination of God's reality (Sheridan, 2000: 169). Detachment, for Eckhart, was a fundamental way of life. It entailed an ascent, the losing, relinquishing and abandoning of everything until one achieved the birth of God in the soul, an apophatic path of mysticism as demonstrated by Evagrius (Smith, 1987: 13). His approach has been referred to as a 'dynamic, apophatic, kenotic and dialectical activity' (Radler, 2006: 111–17), which is reminiscent of Orthodox spirituality and a practice that, in Eckhart's view, aided the integration rather than the sectionalization of the inner and outer dimensions of our lives. Eckhart's doctrine in contrast to the later mystics is speculative, experiential and ontological, in that it expresses the 'relation of created being to the Uncreated' (Smith and Davies, 1996: 318).

Following the 'I Am sayings' attributed to Jesus in the gospel of John, Fox argues that our lives illustrate how, by 'being' rather than 'doing', our 'I-am-ness' develops into its own distinctive 'expression of the Divine' in us. As Eckhart puts it, 'people ought to think less about what they should do and more about what they are'. "'I am" precedes "I do" or "I prove" or "I earn"' (1988a: 154–55).⁵ No Christian mystic has so richly developed the four paths of creation spirituality and the theme of the Cosmic Christ as Eckhart has.

⁵ See Fox, 1983a: 97.

According to Fox, it is time to move from the quest for the historical Jesus and concentrate on the blessing of the Cosmic Christ that, he argues, only the human species have dared to deny. 'It is time, as Meister Eckhart put it, to "deny the denial"' (Fox, 1988a: 8).⁶ Mysticism calls us to return to our roots or origins; 'Everything is full and pure in its source and precisely there, not outside'. He invites us to 'return to God and the core, the soil, the ground, the stream and the source of the Godhead' (Fox 1988a: 56).⁷

When we do that, we derive a living energy for our work and recover our work as an expression of our truest self, our deepest being. 'When word and work are returned to their source and origin', Eckhart promises, 'then all work is accomplished divinely in God. And there too the soul loses itself in a wonderful enchantment'. (1988a: 56)⁸

The two dimensions of mystical experiences are trust and non-dualism. Our mystical experiences are unitive experiences of silence, awe and an experience of non-separation. 'Separate yourself from all twoness', Meister Eckhart advises. 'Be one in one, one with one, one from one' (1988a: 50, 67).⁹ This quotation by Eckhart is referenced at this point to ME, 128, and this indicates Fox's book *Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honouring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart*. It should be noted that this pattern of referencing, where applicable, is constant in Fox's methodology and, as we will see, Eckhart rarely speaks for himself. We are introduced to him through Fox's hermeneutics.

According to Fox, Eckhart seems to have filled a vacuum in Christian history. Scholars such as Aquinas, Albert the Great and Bonaventure had died and, as far as Fox is concerned, the 'creative thinking' that flourished under Scholasticism had declined, leaving 'stark method, rehearsed answers to rehearsed questions, boredom, dullness and a rising anti-intellectualism' (2000a: 14). Preaching, counselling and teaching in the Rhineland, Eckhart, according to Fox, was influenced by both nuns and Beguines. While

⁶ Fox, 1983a: 40.

⁷ See Fox, 2000a: 427, 477.

⁸ See Fox, 1983a: 116.

⁹ Fox, 1983a: 128.

he found inspiration in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Wisdom literature for his sermons and exegesis he was also influenced by the medieval writings of the Jewish philosophers Isaac Ben Solomon Israeli and Judah Halevi. For example, Eckhart's understanding of the 'spark of the soul' was clearly indebted to their writings (2000a: 16, 25–26).¹⁰

Fortunately (possibly providentially) for Fox, Eckhart had moved away from the Fall-redemption theology that was characteristic of Augustinian theology and while he spoke of the soul and the spirit, it was not in dualistic terms. As Fox notes, 'Eckhart turns any objective thinking about body and soul inside out when he says that "my body is more in my soul than my soul is in my body"' (2000a: 123). Despite being a mystic, there is no hint of asceticism, the practice of severe self-discipline and abstention from all forms of indulgence so common in the medieval period, in Eckhart's sermons and treatises (2000a: 6, 30, 43). Moreover, in common with Fox, he saw creation as the utterance of God:

The Father speaks the Son from his entire power and speaks him in all things. All creatures are words of God. My mouth expresses and reveals God but the existence of a stone does the same and people often recognize more from the actions than from words... All creatures may echo God in all their activities. It is, of course, just a small bit which they can reveal. (2000a: 59)

Finally, Fox argues that there are distinct political overtones to Eckhart's theology and, in *Understanding Mysticism*, he focuses attention on the 'General, Political-Mystical Principles' in Eckhart preaching as defined in three areas:

- (i) The merchant mentality.
- (ii) How everyone is an aristocrat.
- (iii) Eckhart's Political condemnation

¹⁰ This is reminiscent of the *Hasidic* ideas of the 'Divine Sparks', which vitalized all components of the environment. See Chapter 2, §4, The Influence of Judaism and Rabbinic Thinking on Matthew Fox.

Owing to this apparent political emphasis in Eckhart's thought, Marxist scholars, such as Ernst Bloch and Erich Fromm, have cited Eckhart as a precursor of the spirit of Karl Marx. Bloch, Fox is happy to report, interpreted Eckhart's historical contribution to socialism as follows:¹¹

In Eckhart the heretical, antiecclesiastical lay movement of the late Middle Ages became articulate in German; which is a decisive factor in any socialist evaluation. Eckhart...demystified the economic and political acts of life for the 'common people' whom he inspired. (1981b: 541–42; see also, Block, 1972: 52)

This supposition is also supported by Reiner Schürmann, who highlights Eckhart's involvement in the class struggle in the Middle Ages (Fox, 1981b: 541–42; see also Schürmann, 1978). Fromm, in one of his humanistic lectures, argued that Eckhart, while a creative writer, often contradicted himself, while he also expressed thoughts that should have remained repressed. Therefore, Fromm argues,

one can understand his role as one of the earliest representatives of non-theistic 'religiosity'. On the level of non-theism Eckhart shares with Buddhism—and as we shall see, with Marx—the position of radical metaphysical skepticism... When Marx speaks of a 'sense of having', he means precisely the same thing that Eckhart called 'ego-boundness'; when Marx uses poverty as the condition for being, his terminology is even identical with that of Eckhart. (Fromm, 1997: 123, 159; see also Fox, 1981b: 549)

Nonetheless, Fox concedes that Eckhart's philosophical and theological ideas are perplexing. Moreover, it seems that Eckhart himself acknowledged this fact in that he observed: 'Many people say: "You make fine speeches to us, but we don't understand anything"' (2000a: 356).

¹¹ For Bloch, see Geoghegan, 1996: 90–94, and see Fromm, 1997: III, 131.

(b) *Meister Eckhart in Passion for Creation*

In *Breakthrough*, revised as *Passion for Creation*, Fox uses his framework of light, darkness, creativity and transformation to interpret Eckhart's ideas, while at the same time presenting him as a champion of creation spirituality. Fox's translation of Eckhart's sermons was intended to illustrate the meeting of two minds across the centuries. The themes, covering the goodness of creation, the holiness of all things, the divine blood in each person, the need to let go, compassion and social justice was to be foundational to the reinvigorated spirituality for the new millennium (in 1980a; see also 2000a).

In the 'Introduction' to *Passion for Creation*, Fox offers us his overview of Eckhart. While Eckhart's corpus of work shaped the thinking of John Tauler and Henry Suso, the Dominican mystics of the next generation, after his death, he was generally forgotten (Smith and Davies, 1996: 318). However, Fox has extended the list of those whom Eckhart influenced, via Aquinas, to the twentieth century. His intention was to offer a reliable English text that linked Eckhart and his readers to mainstream Biblical scholarship. Simultaneously, Fox offers a reliable translation and a commentary, which replaces the older commentaries influenced by Western philosophy, while restructuring Eckhart's sermons and spiritual journey (2000a: 1–10). Eckhart was a man of his time, and they were turbulent times of institutional decadence, corrupt churches and social upheaval, a cultural setting that was distinguished by four characteristics:

- (i) *A population explosion*, in the twelfth and thirteenth century, was suddenly faced with a failing economy, the result of the little ice age (1250 A.D.), which led to crop failure and famine. In the subsequent social upheaval, the rich got richer and the poor poorer while some faced bankruptcy (2000a: 11–12).
- (ii) *Corruption in high places* was especially evident in the conduct of the knights. Once seen as the protectors of the poor, they became part of the problem, as violence and lawlessness spread and society collapsed. The influence of scholasticism was in decline, ecclesiastical decadence grew,

uneducated priests abounded and the growing anti-intellectual climate favoured the vernacular (2000a: 12–15).

(iii) *Radical movements* arose and as the Beguines, Beghards and mystical sects emerged so did the persecution of witches and those who practised the black arts (2000a: 16).

(iv) *A spirit of despair*, which bordered on the apocalyptic, grew—it seemed that the world was coming to an end (2000a: 17–18).

These are ‘the four pillars’ which, for Fox, categorize the social and historical context within which Eckhart lived and which shaped his thought. Next, Fox offers an itinerary of Eckhart’s home life, education and entry into the priesthood, academic life, scholarship and an analysis of the ecclesiastical machinations of the time (2000a: 18–23).

It has to be acknowledged that Cologne was rife with heresies, as well as an intense rivalry between Dominicans and Franciscans. It is not surprising, therefore, that Eckhart was originally denounced as a heretic by a hostile Franciscan archbishop. However, the very notion that Eckhart was proposing an ‘unmediated experience of and union with the divine’ gave the Vatican great cause for concern (Radler, 2006: 111). The idea that the ‘Church’s structures, sacraments, and hierarchies’ would be circumvented was enough to instigate a formal investigation into Eckhart’s work and he was condemned as a heretic in the Papal Bull *In agro dominico* in 1329 (Radler, 2006: 111; Smith and Davies: 1996: 316).¹² The first Dominican to be condemned for heresy, Eckhart insisted that his accusers had taken his sermons out of context. They had interpreted in temporal terms what he had intended to be understood as eternal truths. His accusers demonstrated their own profanity, intellectual poverty and malice:

First, when they say that man cannot be united to God. Second, when they say that the creature is not nothing by itself, but is some kind of slight existence, as we say a drop of salt water is a slight hit of the sea. Third, when they say God created the world in another now than in the

¹² See *In Agro Dominico* (Colledge and McGinn, 1981).

now of eternity, although every action of God is his substance, which is eternal. They do not understand what Augustine in the first book of the *confessions* says to God: ‘All tomorrows and beyond them, and all yesterdays and what is behind them, you are making today and have made today. What is it to me if someone does not understand this?’¹³ (Eckhart, Colledge and McGinn, 1981: 76)

From the time Eckhart was condemned as a heretic, Fox argues he has never been evaluated by theologians. Therefore, to compose a comprehensive assessment, Fox turns his attention to Eckhart’s theology and he offers the reader, in descending order, the most important influences on Eckhart’s thought:

- (i) *The Bible, Jewish scriptures and Hasidism*, he argues, has permeated Eckhart’s theology and spirituality. While saturated in scholasticism and Augustinianism, Eckhart was familiar with the inherent weakness of both. Therefore, he puts compassion ahead of contemplation as the pinnacle of his spirituality (2000a: 24–26).
- (ii) *Thomas Aquinas and the Dominican Spiritual movement* encouraged its members to be actively involved in the world. Eckhart, attributed the spiritual malaise he observed, to a declining monastic system that succoured its members and the rural communities, while neglecting the growing urban population. However, Eckhart is not a Thomist—he is a biblical theologian (2000a: 26–30).
- (iii) *The Celtic mystical tradition and Eastern Christianity* has had a crucial influence on Eckhart. The Celts, a diverse group of tribal societies, found divinity in Nature and worshipped the Mother goddesses and feminine deities. Eckhart, unconvinced by Hellenistic notions of transcendence, was Pelagian in his thinking—creation is grace therefore, asceticism was unnecessary. Simultaneously, he was influenced by Eastern Orthodoxy, which had also been influenced by the Celts (2000a: 30–35).

¹³ Eckhart’s response to the list of Fifty-Nine Articles.

(iv) *The Beguine movement* also impacted on Eckhart. He came into contact with them through his travels, preaching and counselling, while he also listened and learned from them (2000a: 24–42).

Fox argues that other theologians have projected Augustinian thought on to Eckhart. Therefore, to correct this anomaly, he re-examines Eckhart's principal theological themes, which make up his creation-centred theology. Fox identifies fourteen repressed themes, which he argues are not to be found in the Fall-redemption tradition:

- (i) The creative word of God (*Dabhar*).
- (ii) Blessing.
- (iii) Panentheism.
- (iv) Realised eschatology.
- (v) Celebration of all beings in God's blessing-filled cosmos.
- (vi) Letting go, and letting creation be the holy blessing that it is.
- (vii) The unknown, unnameable God who is a non-God.
- (viii) The divination and deification of humanity.
- (ix) Spirituality is a growth process.
- (x) Creativity is the word of God in us.
- (xi) Compassion the fullness of spiritual maturity.
- (xii) Everyone is a royal person.
- (xiii) Jesus Christ as reminder of what it means to be God's child.
- (xiv) Laughter, newness and joy. (2000a: 42–48)

(c) *Fox's Manipulation of Eckhart's Text*

Fox, having subjected Eckhart to a creation-centred hermeneutic, composed his interpretation according to a fourfold composition that replaced Eckhart's seven sermons. This structure becomes the interpretative schema through which Fox continues to interpret both creation spirituality and Eckhart. In the Chart below Eckhart's sermons are on the left while Fox's corresponding text is on the right (1983a). In Eckhart's scheme, Sermon 1 is *The Attractive Power of God* (see Eckhart 1909), while Fox's Sermon 1 is *Creation: All creatures are words of God*. Fox has not just renamed

Eckhart's sermons he has reduced and reorganized Eckhart's original plan. This makes it difficult to identify or compare and contrast Eckhart's original work with Fox's hermeneutics.

Eckhart	Fox
I. The Attractive Power Of God St John vi. 44	<i>I. Creation: All creatures are words of God</i>
II. The Nearness Of The Kingdom St Luke xxi. 31	II. Letting Go and Letting Be
III. The Angel's Greeting St Luke i. 28	III. Breakthrough and giving Birth to Self and God
IV. True Hearing Ecclesiasticus xxiv. 30	IV. The New Creation
V The Self-Communication of God St John xiv. 23	
VI Sanctification St Luke x. 42	
VII Outward and Inward Morality I Cor. xv. 10	

Fig. 3

As we have seen from the above chart, Fox has been selective in his choice of sermons and he has chosen not to follow Eckhart's original scheme or paragraph divisions. His cross references and footnotes in Sermon IX (Path 1: Creation), for example, point to 'Eckhart, *Die deutschen Werke*, ed. by Josef Quint' (which Tugwell dismisses as unsuitable), C. H. Dodd, R. R. Ruether, C. Westermann and his own work, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart* (2000a: 553). However, there is also a large index of spiritual themes: for example, birthing of self, cosmic consciousness, creativity, dualism, letting be and the *Via Negativa* (2000a: 573–79). One wonders, would Eckhart recognize his own sermons? In defence of Fox, it must be noted that he is not alone, Quint features frequently in other academic bibliographies on Eckhart and it must be taken into

consideration that Tugwell is also an English Dominican and could hardly be seen to support an ex-Dominican that Ratzinger had summarily dismissed.¹⁴

Furthermore, in the back of *Original Blessing* Fox offers three appendices: a two-column chart that contrasts the features of Fall-redemption and creation-centred spirituality (B); an annotated bibliography (C); and a family-tree of historical creation-centred spirituality (A). The latter offers a strange Michelin style star system that rates the qualities or credentials of those who have ‘lived or taught the creation-centered tradition’, beginning with Jesus and extending into the nineteenth century. On a descending scale Jesus gets top marks (five stars), St Francis and Hildegard (four stars), with lower ratings, from three to one, for those who follow. This is significant because Fox awards Eckhart four stars on his scale and, in support of his spirituality of justice and compassion, he quotes Eckhart, arguing, ‘You may call God love; you may call God goodness; but the best name for God is Compassion’ (1983b: 310; cf. 1999a: 34).

(d) A Critique of Matthew Fox’s Analysis of Meister Eckhart

Pacwa as we have seen argues that Fox’s panentheism is rooted in the late Neo-Platonism of Eckhart, who Fox categorizes as a creation-centred theologian (1992a: n.p.). Drzenovich draws uncritically on Fox’s analysis of Eckhart and, quoting freely, he claims that the Beguine mystics Mechthild of Magdeburg and Marguerite Porete shared Eckhart’s vision. Eckhart, he argues, while diverging from Aquinas’ thinking, had an affinity with Dionysius and the Eastern Church. Eckhart insisted ‘that in the ground of reality there is absolute identity between God and the soul particularly the intellect, the highest part of the soul’ (2003: 1). Eckhart’s overriding theme was his ‘understanding of the intellect as the *Imago Dei* of man’ and ‘his metaphysical understanding of being’ in that ‘entering into the mystery of God, or “sinking eternally” into this One, was for everyone’ (Drzenovich, 2003: 1).

James Wiseman notes that Eckhartian scholarship, such as that of Kurt Ruh, Frank Tobin and Thomas Merton, has drawn very different conclusions to Fox, and that Fox, in

¹⁴ The following have all used Quint in their various deliberations on Eckhart: see W. Corduan (1994), O. F. Summerell (1998), B. McGinn (1981, 1986), E. Fromm (2005), E. Bloch (2000), C. F. Kelley (2008).

turn, has spurned such academic approaches to Eckhart. Instead, he insists on a clear distinction and choice between Fall-redemption and creation spirituality principles. Traditional scholarship, he argues, is characterized by ‘too much analysis, too much dissecting, too much left side of the brain activity’ (1989: 31). Hence, there is a clear disagreement between Fox’s understanding of Eckhart and that of other scholars.

Simon Tugwell, for example, has argued that Fox has failed on all points. Indeed, he has understood very little. Fox presents Eckhart as a modern presidential candidate with all the usual catch phrases, standing on his principles while denouncing everyone else. Fox’s ‘Introduction’, in which he presents us with his interpretation of Eckhart is, according to Tugwell, delusional and little more than ‘wishful thinking’ (1982: 195–97), so much so, in fact, that an academic critique of his work, such as Tugwell seeks to offer is almost impossible. Fox’s subjection of Eckhart to a Celtic interpretation reduces Tugwell, without reading any further, to a ‘helpless gibbering fury’ at Fox’s self-delusional chimera (1982: 195–97). Indeed, there seems to be no independent evidence to support Fox’s claim that Eckhart was influenced by Celtic spirituality at all.

Highly critical, not to say dismissive of Fox’s thesis, Tugwell argues that there is no proof that Eckhart was associated with the Beguines or nuns, while the claim that he was a feminist, when feminism is clearly an anachronism, is nonsensical (1982: 195–97). Having said that, Bernard McGinn has recognized that an investigation into the connection between Eckhart and the Beguines was long overdue and he notes the shift, which was taking place in the thirteenth century, with the ‘large-scale emergence of women’s voices in the history of Christian thought’ (McGinn, 1997: 65). The Beguine, Margaret Porete, a French mystic and the author of *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, a spiritual book on divine love, was burnt at the stake in Paris in 1310, having refused to recant (McGinn, 1997: 65).¹⁵ The book survived and, in the last twenty-five years, proof has arisen that Eckhart had read, and been influenced by it.

Now that the treatise has been rejoined to its author...we can begin to assess the extraordinary verbal dependence and affinity of thought

¹⁵ See Porete and Babinsky, 1993.

between Marguerite's work and Meister Eckhart's. Marguerite's and Eckhart's paths into the nothingness of the Godhead both converge and diverge, like parallel lines that meet in infinity. While the divergence of their paths should be noted, it must be viewed in the light of the much greater convergence of mystical destiny. (McGinn, 1997: 65)

McGinn argues persuasively, that Eckhart would have been familiar with the work of Hadewijch and probably with Mechthild of Magdeburg, due to the similarity in writing, vocabulary, interpretation and concepts (1997: 17, 22). Eckhart's interest in mysticism and women's spirituality was well known to the other Dominicans, who were involved in the spiritual care of the Beguines. Therefore, he could easily have become familiar with the 'world of vernacular feminine spirituality' (1997: 19), but the evidence, McGinn argues, was possibly ignored because of twentieth-century academic arguments.

Eckhart was fluent in both Latin and German and preaching in the vernacular was common and expected among the mendicants, especially the Dominicans (Tugwell, 1982: 195–97). Nonetheless, his preaching contributed to the hostility that arose around him. While his Latin was scholarly and erudite his vernacular German was bold, imaginative, but easily misinterpreted because he used 'striking images and teasing paradoxes' (Smith and Davies, 1996: 317). Nonetheless, in Tugwell's opinion, Fox overemphasizes this point and he exaggerates Eckhart's use of the vernacular by insinuating that it was a daring eccentricity that only he practised in the face of Vatican disapproval (1982: 195–97).¹⁶

As an aside, it is worth noting at this point that Fox persistently aligns himself with persecuted Catholic theologians.¹⁷ There is always a sense of reflected glory in his schema in that he aligns himself with theologians such as Leonardo Boff.¹⁸ As Molly O'Neill remarks, 'Fox embraced both his dismissal and collegial criticism as a true

¹⁶ Fox repeats these claims (1981a: 19; 1995b: 118).

¹⁷ The works of such persecuted theologians (e.g. Congar, Chenu, de Chardin and Loisy) were threatened inclusion in the 'Index of Prohibited Books'. See above, Chapter 1, §3 (a), A Quasi-Dominican Life at Loras College.

¹⁸ See, 1988b, Fox letter to Cardinal Ratzinger.

penitent would a hair shirt. “Consider my company”, he said. “Galileo, Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart were all persecuted by the church” (1993: C 1). This sense of solidarity with the persecuted, not only functions as a stamp of authenticity, but it permeates his sense of theological continuity with Eckhart (1982: 195–97).

While Eckhart was obviously familiar with the scriptures, according to Fox, his use of the title ‘Great Redeemer’ for Christ proves that he had an affinity with Jewish thinking. For example, he notes that, the founder of *Hasidism*, the Baal Shem-Tov, said, ‘in remembrance resides the secret of redemption’ (2000a: 26). Tugwell rejects this argument and, while he offers no alternative theory, he challenges Fox’s certitude on both points. Similarly, he also disputes Fox’s description of Eckhart as the most ‘spiritual Franciscan theologian in the church’ (1982: 196), a point that Fox, is eager to establish because he wants to align himself with both St Francis and Eckhart. He does this largely because Fox understands Francis, in contrast to Augustine, to have rejected Platonic Dualism.¹⁹ Nevertheless, as Tugwell rightly comments, Francis espoused a ‘marked dualism of souls and body’ and good and evil which meant that he was able to view nature in a positive light (1982: 196).

Tugwell concedes that Eckhart is extremely difficult to translate accurately from the original Middle High German given that his use of language is idiosyncratic and his sentence-structures almost impossible to reproduce. Moreover, it is frequently necessary to weigh up what he preaches in one sermon over and against another sermon where he appears to contradict himself. Incorrectly approached, this can lead to a partisan and selective interpretation as demonstrated by various philosophers and other adherents of a dogmatic ideology (1982: 195–97).

According to Tugwell, the disaster of Fox’s ‘Introduction’ might have been ‘bearable if the effects were counteracted subsequently’ in the translated sermons and commentary (1982: 197). However, the ‘effects are maintained throughout, by judicious mistranslation and highly selective quotations’ (1982: 197) and a translation based on

¹⁹ See §2 above, Augustine Abandoned.

Josef Quint's questionable modern German translation of Eckhart. However, while these criticisms are damning, more serious is Tugwell's contention that Fox, despite errors in syntax, is mistranslating intentionally to emphasize Eckhart's affinity with creation-centred spirituality. Comparing Eckhart's text with Fox's interpretation convincingly illustrates Tugwell's argument.

Eckhart: 'Sermon II. The Nearness of the Kingdom' (St Luke xxi. 31)

God is equally near in all creatures. The wise man saith, "God hath spread out His net over all creatures, so that whosoever wishes to discover Him may find and recognize Him in each one". Another saith, "He knows God rightly who recognizes Him alike in all things". To serve God with fear is good; to serve Him out of love is better; but to fear and love Him together is best of all. To have a restful or peaceful life in God is good; to bear a life of pain in patience is better; but to have peace in the midst of pain is the best of all. (Eckhart, 1909)

Fox: 'Sermon IV. Waking up to the nearness of God's Kingdom' (St Luke xxi. 31)

God is equally near to all creatures. The wise man says in Ecclesiasticus: God has his net, his hunters' ploy, spread out over all creatures... Thus, all people can find him in everything, so long as they can penetrate this net filled with creatures and keep God in mind and recognise God in everything. Thus we find a teacher saying that the person who knows God most truly is the one who can find him equally in all things. I also said on one occasion that it is good to serve God in fear, better to serve God in love, but best of all to be able to find love in the very fear itself. It is good that a person has a peaceful life; it is better that a person bear a troublesome life with patience. But best of all is that a person can have peace even in the midst of trouble. (2000a: 137)

Tugwell specifically argues that Fox is deliberately writing with creation-centredness in mind. In Sermon I, Fox translates *abgeschiedenheit* as 'letting go', which has a 'nice

beat-Zen to it'.²⁰ The problem is that, it obscures Eckhart's original meaning of 'separation'. Next, Fox translates Eckhart as saying that, 'human beings must become unwed from themselves and from all things', whereas the correct interpretation is 'be empty of ourselves and of all things' (1982: 197). We read that the Father 'speaks the Son in all things' rather than the Father 'speaks all things in the Son' but, as Tugwell remarks, it would be tedious to go on (1982: 197; Fox, 2000a: 57–58).

Finally, even though he was intent on writing a scholarly tome, Fox did not consult the required academic sources. Indeed, Tugwell eventually gives up the task of critiquing *Breakthrough*, so flawed does he believe it to be. He concludes that Fox's hermeneutics are misrepresenting Eckhart and that this must cast doubt on his reliability and the veracity of his Eckhartian scholarship in subsequent books (1982: 195–97).

(e) Hildegard of Bingen—Sibyl of the Rhine (1098–1179)

Hildegard was born into a noble family and, as was customary, her parents offered her, the tenth child, as a tithe to God. A woman of many talents who has been compared to Dante Alighieri and William Blake, she was an accomplished abbess, hagiographer, historian, mystic, painter and writer as well as being noted for her devotional songs, lyrical and prose poetry. Fox chooses to interpret these prolific talents as the consequence of a profound mysticism, which, is comparable to creation spirituality (Fox, 1984a, 1985a, 1987a; King, 1998: 82–85; Newman, 1992: 5–10).

(f) Fox's Interpretation of Hildegard of Bingen

Hildegard is introduced in Fox's first book as an original representative of the creation-centred spiritual tradition, and the mother of the Rhineland mystics, who recognized and endorsed the sensual ecstasy and sexuality of humankind. A sensate humanity which is formed from the earth and mutually dependent with the animal kingdom, acknowledges that all things which proceed from God are good (1981a: 15–16). Hildegard's thought, Fox argues, fills key gaps in Western Christianity:

²⁰ Fox repeats this understanding of *abgeschiedenheit* as 'letting go' in *Western Spirituality* and his chapter on Eckhart (1981c: 215–48).

gaps that have left the cosmos and cosmic Christ out of theology; gaps that have ignored humanity's divinity and creativity; gaps that have repressed humanity's relationship to all of creation, gaps that divorce salvation from active, useful, and effective healing of peoples and societies; gaps that ignore women's experiences; gaps that have obliterated the creation-centered spiritual tradition. (1985a: 13)

This is bold rhetoric, which, as Kenneth Russell notes, betrays a certain apprehension regarding the Church and traditional teaching (1989: 39). Obviously, even at this early stage in his writing career, Fox had already had an altercation with the Catholic hierarchy. 'Shame on them!' he cries. 'Scolding me from behind their ivory-towered seminary systems and their violent academic bureaucracies' (Fox, 1981a: 6). The point is that his writing on Hildegard needs to be understood in this context. Fox portrays Hildegard as an influential prophet, a woman in a misogynistic male church. He, therefore, enlists her in his fight against those who have stifled the tradition of creation spirituality. Indeed, she and he, Fox believes, are fighting a common cause. She is a political, social activist; an oppressed *anawin* because she struggled with restrictive cultural conventions, while refusing to be silenced, 'I have learned to fear more the judgement of God, should I, God's small creature, keep silent', Hildegard argues (1985a: 13–14). Moreover, since the *anawim* are associated with the unordained, the creation-centred tradition, Fox claims, is fundamentally a lay spirituality as seen in the work of 'St Francis...Pelagius, all the catholic women and artists and scientists' as well as prophets, feminists and those seeking wisdom (Fox, 1983b: 264–65). For Fox, Hildegard's psycho-physical struggle and example of creative art, offers healing for the oppressed, while her feminist political and social activism may inform feminist thought today. Fox, reminiscent of Elizabeth Fiorenza's arguments, in her book, *In Memory of Her*, argues that Hildegard speaks of and for a silent generation of women that the Church ignored then and continues to ignore today, *she is an early proponent of creation spirituality* (1985a: 13–14; cf. 1987a: 13, 354).

While Gerald Downing also acknowledges Hildegard's unhesitating criticism of the social mores of her time, he argues that 'elements of conventional female self-belittling

appear in Hildegard'. That said, she actually inverts the conventions of the time by remarking how effeminate contemporary male leaders must be for God to transmit his instructions through a woman!' (2004: 433; see also Hart and Bishop, 1990: 471).²¹ Downing's suggestion is supported and expanded by Barbara Newman. She notes that, Guibert, a seer, argued that Hildegard had 'transcended female subjection by a lofty height and is equal to the eminence not of just any men but of the very highest' (1987: 2). Hildegard replied modestly, emphasizing her frailty and insecurity. Adopting monastic formulas of humility, which had long been '*de rigueur*', she identified herself as '*ego pauperula feminea forma*—“a poor little figure of a woman”—appealing inversely to...ideas that led the Cistercians to compare her to the Virgin Mary, the handmaid of God' (Newman, 1987: 2). However, the dialectic cuts both ways:

a 'poor little female' could be exalted to miraculous heights only on condition that her normal status remained inferior and subservient... Never did she suggest that, as a woman and a Christian, she had any 'right' to teach or prophesy in the Church. Nor did she claim or demand equality with men. Rather, she insisted that God had chosen a poor, frail, untutored woman like herself to reveal his mysteries only because those to whom he had first entrusted them—the wise, learned, and masculine clergy—had failed to obey. She lived in a 'womanish age' (*muliebre tempus*) in which men had become so lax, weak, and sensual—in a word, effeminate—that God had to confound them by making women 'virile'. Choosing an instrument by nature frail and despicable, he proved again that he could work wonders despite all human order and disorder. (Newman, 1987: 3)

Inspired by the profuse greenery and fertile soil around the abbey where she lived, for Hildegard, metaphorically *viriditas* represented the vigorous and life-giving qualities of God's Spirit and this, has become a term that has also inspired Fox's ecological thought. Spring is *viriditas*, a germination force, a fruitfulness that permeates creation. The earth, she declared, 'sweats germinating power from its very pores' (1985a: 32). She

²¹ Letter 24, in Fox, 1987a: 322.

celebrates the panentheistic, maternal, ‘roundness of God... Divinity is like a wheel, a circle, a whole’ unending eternal (Fox, 1984a: 98). Likewise, in accordance with eco-feminist spirituality (see Ruether, 1994, 2006), Fox is inspired by Hildegard because she also expounds a rejection of soul-body dualism in her equation which, expresses the thought that the soul refreshes the body just as the earth is refreshed by moisture (1981a: 16):

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{body earth} \\ \hline = \\ \hline \text{soul moisture} \end{array}$$

While Downing challenges Hildegard’s alleged green credentials (2004: 423–50), Fox nevertheless sees more than a hint of eco-feminism in her writing and portrays her as a keen environmentalist. Hildegard, he argues, understood the ultimate sin to be environmental neglect and abuse:

a sin against the earth, against the air, against the waters, against God’s creation—for in injuring creation’s interdependent balance we are destroying all life including our own... The earth should not be destroyed! The earth should not be injured! (Uhlein and Hildegard, 1983: 10)

Hildegard’s ecological consciousness, according to Fox, drew on three sources: the scriptures; the Celts; and women’s experience. The last of these is foundational to her understanding of God as mother and her development of feminine language for God. The recovery of this ancient ‘divine motherhood’ fosters compassion and undergirds her key cosmic themes: earthiness; blessing; goodness; and panentheism. Moreover, this emphasis on a feminine reading is, for obvious reasons, not a mere pacifier to feminists, in that it would be entirely anachronistic. Rather it is for Fox a return to a more ancient feminine understanding of God that nullifies the affect of patriarchy (Fox, 1984a: 98–100). These basic points in Fox’s appreciation of Hildegard are important for understanding the subsequent development of creation spirituality. Indeed, arguing that her thought is less anthropocentric than the Greek Fathers, Fox deduces that Hildegard’s

theology is cosmological, wisdom-centred and prophetic in outlook, a creational liberation theology comparable to the ‘cosmic liberation that Paul wrote about in Romans 8’ (Fox in Uhlein and Hildegard, 1983: 11). Addressing his themes of art and work as meditation, Fox views creative work as a sacrament, the divine creation expressed in the world through human individuals (1983b: 188ff.). Consequently, he argues that religion is called to honour the healing art of artists, like Hildegard, who produced books and illuminations believing that ‘good work makes the cosmic wheel go around’ (1988a: 206). In this sense, for Fox, she was a feminist in the creational liberationist tradition.

Having experienced intense lucid visions since childhood, Hildegard consulted her confessor. Subsequently, a board of theologians confirmed the authenticity of her visions and the monk Volmar was designated to help her record them in writing. The finished work, *Scivias* (1141–1152; ‘*Sci vias lucis*’= ‘know the way of light’), took ten years to write, but eventually established her fame throughout Europe. It was divided into three parts and describes twenty-six visions, illustrated with colourful, breathtaking miniatures. These images, inspired by her visions and modelled on the fashionable manuscript illuminations of the time, were transposed into a theological teaching tool (Hart and Bishop, 1990: 12, 55). While her writing is formal, Newman argues that there is no ambiguity in Hildegard. She is sure of what she has received. The details in each vision are symbolic and her depiction of the divine Son of Man (*Scivias* 3.10.1–9; 3.11.9) represents the Church as Christ’s earthly representative. However, they were comprehensive enough for members of her community to translate and reproduce them on vellum (1987: 11–12, 234).

In 1985 Fox published his interpretation of Hildegard’s visions in *The Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, arguing that ‘if Hildegard had been a man, she would be well known as one of the greatest artists and intellectuals the world has ever seen’ (1985a: back cover). He presents the reader with a commentary and twenty five large colour reproductions of Hildegard’s visions or, as he refers to them, ‘illuminations’, which is, of course, a term that usually refers to the decorating of manuscripts with paintings and ornaments. The flame of the Holy Spirit is illustrated in Hildegard’s self-portrait and

speaks of God as ‘the living light and the obscured illumination’ (1985a: 9) who called her, as a prophet, to speak to the people.

People who follow the ways of wisdom ‘will themselves become a fountain gushing from the waters of life... For these waters—that is, the believers—are a spring that can never be exhausted or run dry. No one will ever have too much of them...the waters through which we have been reborn to life have been sprinkled by the Holy Spirit’.
(1985a: 9–10)

Overall, Hildegard, because her holistic outlook launched the Rhineland mystical movement and the creation-centred tradition, is central to the development of Fox’s theology. In that, he understands Hildegard as offering a ‘radical opportunity for global religious *ecumenism*’ because she embraces global peace, justice and spirituality (1985a: 15–16). As a prophetess, her work, Fox argues, intruded on the complacent and disturbed princes, emperors, popes, abbots and monks alike, while she was a forerunner of the Reformation to come. Her ecological spirituality has the ability to speak to our own ecological consciousness. She is in ‘tune with the universe...wakened to the divine...while expressing the intrinsic holiness of being’ (1985a: 18). She challenges our theological methodology and left brain activity because her imagery, mandala drawing, poetry, music and drama are a right-brain activity and a holistic education (1985a: 19).

Finally, for Fox, Hildegard awakens us to a ‘symbolic consciousness’ that connects us to a ‘deeper ecumenism, to deeper healing, to deeper art, to deeper mysticism and to a deeper social justice’ (1985a: 20), a movement, that Fox argues, has the capacity to unite the West to non-European peoples, in that the symbols, myths and images that Hildegard painted are the foundation stones of the spiritual life (1985a: 20). Our inheritance from Hildegard is described by Fox as follows:

her experience as a woman and her personal struggle for liberation; her marrying of science art and religion; her psychology of microcosm/macrocosm; her potential for global religious ecumenism

based on her deep mysticism; her prophetic commitment to justice; her deep ecological sense, her commitment for to holistic education and theological methodology; her symbolic consciousness. (1985a: 20)

Having argued the above, Fox moves on to examine and comment on the twenty five images. Intricate, in detail, they refer to Hildegard's spiritual awakening or the interaction of the spirit with creation and many are *mandala* like—circular figures that represent the universe in Hindu and Buddhist symbolism. Fox's chapter titles, which reveal much about his interpretation of Hildegard include: 'The Man in Sapphire Blue: A Study in Compassion'; 'Hildegard's Awakening: A Self Portrait'; '*Viriditas*: Greening Power'; 'Egg of the Universe'; 'The Cosmic Wheel'; 'Sophia: Mother Wisdom'; 'Mother Church'. In short he presents Hildegard as visionary who recognizes goodness of creation and uses her paintings as a means of contemplative meditation in a contemporary setting (Fox, 1985a). Hildegard, Fox argues,

 painted mandalas, or psychocosmograms, to elicit an experience of the Christ. In one of her paintings, 'The Man in Sapphire Blue', she depicts what she calls the 'golden and fiery ropes of the Universe' that hold 'all things together' (IHB, 23). She emphasized that 'the Man in Sapphire Blue' dwells in every person as a power of divine compassion to heal. Another painting depicts the universe as residing within the belly of divinity, who is called a 'Lady Named Love' (IHB, 39). It is an amazing picture of panentheism—all creatures in God and God in all creatures. The feet of the figure represent the two thrones of justice and righteousness (i.e., mysticism) that support the universe. (1988a: 110)

Hildegard was noble born, however we cannot underestimate the courage it took for a noble woman of her time, to 'take up wax tablets and stylus in the name of God', in addition to becoming a public preacher and an advocate for monastic and clerical reform (Hart and Bishop, 1990: 9). However, as Russell argues, Fox interprets Hildegard as 'modern and almost Dominican in status' (1989: 41). But, of course, Hildegard, was

fully aware of her rank as a noblewoman and was quite capable of asserting herself or engaging in power, politics or gender games if necessary (1989: 41–42). Again, while Fox develops a potentially interesting theology, it is difficult to take his interpretation of Hildegard, or indeed any of the mystics seriously.

(g) Hildegard of Bingen and a Critique of Fox's Analysis of Hildegard of Bingen

Barbara Newman is perhaps the most vocal critic of Fox's meditations on Hildegard. Having said that, it is worth noting that, while Fox's publications stress Hildegard's creation-centred thought and are aimed at readers of 'popular theology', Newman emphasizes her 'theology of the feminine'. That is to say, both Fox and Newman are selective in their analysis of Hildegard, ignoring how her theology may have developed in reaction to her life at Disibodenberg (Mews, 1998: 52–53).

It is perhaps unsurprising that Fox has managed to infuriate Hildegardian scholars. The 'ursine mystic' (1992: 5), as Newman dubs Fox, has effectively reworked Hildegard's thought into what he terms an 'American style' spirituality (Fox, 2001a: xvi, xxv; cf. 1981a: 32). Fox, Newman argues, encourages and enables his readers to believe they are affiliated, on a deep spiritual level, with a medieval mystic (1992: 5–10). This is typical of the romanticizing of the premodern evident in much contemporary alternative spirituality (Partridge, 2004: 5–10, 77–78).

If Hildegard's medieval liturgy and sacramental theology was orthodox, her reformist inclinations were radical, especially, in relation to her theology of salvation history and her views on the future of the Church and its apocalyptic ending (Kerby-Fulton, 1998: 72). God is shared love, not just self love and her visions concentrated on God's relationship with creation and his creative Word manifested in the Son. While she hardly mentions the sacraments of the Church, she highlights the worldliness of some clergy and the coming trials that the future Church will face (Mews, 1998: 58, 64). She was unique, because of her interest in physics and cosmology (*Scivias* 2.1), and the 'details of the "natural" world' as evidence of God's sustaining word and divine action. Hildegard's thought has been described as 'holistic and healing', in that it celebrates the cosmos while seeking 'compassion, peace and justice' (King, 1998: 84).

Hildegard's achievements and talents would have marked her as an extraordinary woman in any age. However, hemmed in as she was by the social mores of a misogynistic world, her works are phenomenal. Nonetheless, as Newman argues, she was ignored for centuries, her work and authorship questioned (Newman, 1998: 1). While one skeptical historian cast doubt on her authenticity, one fideist claimed that God was a 'ghostwriter' and Hildegard a passive tool (1998: 1). However, even now Newman comments,

despite enormous advances in scholarship on medieval women, she is still portrayed at times as an anomaly. Some books give the impression that she dropped into her world like a meteorite from a late-twentieth-century sky, proclaiming enlightened postmodern views on gender, ecology, ecumenism and holistic health to an uncomprehending age. (1998: 1)

This impression is fostered by the publications of Bear & Company, notably in Uhlein's *Meditations with Hildegard of Bingen*, Fox's *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, and Strehlow and Hertzka's *Hildegard of Bingen's Medicine* (Newman, 1998: 210, n. 4; Newman in Hart and Bishop, 1990: 47, n. 89). Bear & Company has 'promoted Fox's brand of creation spirituality by publishing his own works, primers of the New Cosmology, and the popular "*Meditations with*" series' into free adaptations' (Newman, 1992: 5).

Since much of this continuity is a fiction constructed by Bear & Company's practice of selective editing and dubious translation, the press's successful promotion of these texts creates a problem for anyone concerned with historical as well as spiritual truth-in-packaging. (Newman, 1992: 5)

While there is much to admire in Fox's productive output, much of what he writes about Hildegard, and, indeed, every other historical figure he cites, turns out to be incorrect—'factually careless, anachronistic, and tendentious' (Newman, 1992: 6). Ignoring the original Latin, most of his quotations on Hildegard that appear in his many books arise

from Bear & Company's *Meditations* (Uhlein, 1983) or his own books, *Illuminations* (1985) and *Hildegard of Bingen, Book of Divine Works* (1987). They are 'taken out of context, translated second-hand from the German, bowdlerized to remove offending language and paraphrased in a relentlessly banal and simplistic style' (Newman, 1992: 6).

While Hildegard's holistic cosmology is acceptable, her defence of social and ecclesiastical hierarchies are not so welcome by Fox. Moreover, Bear & Company's translation of *Scivias*, the first volume of Hildegard's theological trilogy, has inexplicably been pruned to about half of its original size. Seemingly, the editor removed everything that he deemed immaterial or too difficult to understand (Newman 1992: 5–6). Among these were long sections promoting

orthodox sexual ethics, commending virginity, expounding the theology of baptism and Eucharist, condemning heresy, upholding priestly ordination and celibacy, defending the feudal privilege of nobles, and exhorting the obedience of subjects. In other words, Hildegard is welcome to Fox's mystical pantheon so long as she refrains from being a twelfth-century Catholic. (Newman, 1992: 6)

It is possible that they were deleted to commend a more liberal form of mysticism, which celebrates the bodily and the sexual (Partridge, 2004: 81). Nonetheless, although the terms *eros* and *agape* are interchangeable, Newman certainly uses the term *eros* in connection with Hildegard's work. Her visions, she argues, 'are charged with the much more primitive and powerful appeal of *eros*', while she describes the Virgin Mary as 'an embodied Eden...everything about her is joy innocence, asexual *eros*' (1987: 187). Hildegard's antiphon, *O quam magnum miraculum*, takes as its subject the exalted submissiveness of Mary. Hildegard presents her as the 'quintessential woman once again conflating Mary with Eve...and woman becomes the scourge of the earth and the ornament of heaven' (1987: 184). Thus, the woman 'ruins and restores' because,

a woman built the house of death
a shining maid tore it down:
so the sublimest blessing
comes in the form of a woman
surpassing all creation,
for God became man in a maid
most tender and blessed. (1987: 185)²²

Furthermore, in her section on the ‘Commendation of Chastity’ (*Scivias*, 1.2.24), Hildegard elevates and speaks of God’s view of virginity as

my most loving sheep who are securely placed in My heart, the seed of chastity. Virginity was made by Me, for My Son was born of a virgin. And therefore virginity is the most beautiful fruit of all the fruits of the valleys, and the greatest of all the persons in the palace of the unfailing King; for it was not subject to the precept of the law, since it brought My Only-Begotten into the world. Therefore, listen, all those who wish to follow My Son, in the innocence of free chastity or in the solitude of mourning widowhood: Virginity unspotted from the beginning is nobler than widowhood oppressed under the yoke of a husband, even though widowhood, after the grief of the loss of a husband, would imitate virginity. (Hart and Bishop, 1990: 85)

These passages, while embracing the feminine or the womanly, emphasize Mary’s strength, example and submissiveness. But it is the figure of wisdom, which first appears and takes priority in *Scivias* 3, who is close to Hildegard’s heart.

For in a sapiential theology of creation...the feminine is the immanent divine principle that mediates between the transcendent God and his creature. She is Wisdom and Love, energy, synergy, and beauty...

²² *Leider* No. 7: 218.

Creation is 'Wisdom's vesture': it reveals the hidden God just as a person's clothes hint at his body. (Newman, 1987: 250)

Wisdom is personified manifested and involved in the divine–human collaboration of creation:

I, the fiery life of divine essence, am aflame beyond the beauty of the meadows. I gleam in the waters. I burn in the sun, moon, and stars. With every breeze, as with invisible life that contains everything, I awaken everything to life. I am the breeze that nurtures all things green. I encourage blossoms to flourish with ripening fruits. I am the rain coming from the dew that causes the grasses to laugh with the joy of life. (King, 1998: 84; see also, Newman, 1987: 71; Fox, 1987a: 8-9)²³

Fox however, is intent on stressing Hildegard's 'womanly wisdom', therefore predictably he connects her to the Goddess and the Holy Spirit:

Myths around the world describe the Goddess as the keeper of the flame, for woman is the custodian of the hearth and spiritual power. It is interesting that, as we have seen, both Hildegard of Bingen's self-portrait and the early Christian story of Pentecost are about flames coming over the apostles—this may well be a reference to the goddess dimension of the Christ power that early Christians recognized. A hint of the Holy Spirit as Feminine. (2001b: 122)

Fox persistently ignores the fact that she was a 'consecrated virgin', blithely ascribing to her his own ideas about 'the recovery of *eros*'. Hildegard, he argues taught that Adam's sin was a failure in *eros* in that he did not delight in the earth (1988a: 26). Moreover, because he wants to portray her as a feminist, he reinterprets her 'Trinitarian thought to

²³ In the final visionary work, the tripartite *Liber Divinorum Operum* (1163—1173/74) (*Book of Divine Works*) was also called *De Operatione Dei* (*On the Workings of God*), and wisdom is portrayed in DOD Vision 1, III.9.14, PL 197: 996b.

fit the standards of an inclusive-language lectionary' (Newman, 1992: 7). The divine Mother remains, while the Father and Son become irrelevant and while Fox does not openly criticize any offensive features in Hildegard's thought; he 'simply ignores them' (Newman, 1992: 7).

Within feminist thought the holistic concept of body and spirit and personal moral freedom are non-negotiable. However, while Hildegard is familiar with both concepts she holds them in opposition. Thus, contemporary interpretations misrepresent her thinking in order to present her as a feminist. As Newman argues, Hildegard emphasized unity, but her writing is full of the conflict between soul and body (1987: 154). Hildegard associated moral and spiritual freedom with a dualistic conception of the self: the soul makes its way toward salvation by sharply divorcing itself from the desires of the body.

Just as a mirror, which reflects all things, is set in its own container, so too the rational soul is placed in the fragile container of the body. In this way, the body is governed in its earthly life by the soul, and the soul contemplates heavenly things through faith. Hear, then, O son of God, what the unfailing Light says. Man is both heavenly and earthly through the good knowledge of the rational soul, he is heavenly; and through the bad, fragile and full of darkness. And the more he recognizes the good in himself, the more he loves God. (Hildegard in Baird and Ehrman, 1994: 22)²⁴

Uhlein argues that Hildegard ignored the scholastic Latin of her time, which was 'rife with dualism' while espousing a 'holistic cosmology' (1983: 15). Meanwhile, because he want to believe that Creator and creation, soul, body and truth are one (1987a: 20), Fox argues that Hildegard is the means to healing the 'dualism between nature and history, creation and salvation, mysticism and prophecy' (1985a: 15). The latter is an odd claim to make, since, in the text that follows, Fox insists that Hildegard contrasts

²⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, letter to the Monk Guibert, 1175.

‘earthly things’ with ‘heavenly things’ and makes an assertion concerning the dualistic bent of which is hard to deny:

Whoever shows devout faith...by ‘scorning earthly things, and by revering heavenly things, will be counted as righteous’, and again, ‘we cannot at the same time serve God and the Devil because whatever God loves, the Devil hates... The flesh finds delight in what is sinful, and the soul thirsts after justice’. (1987a: 20, 54)

Hildegard’s dualistic language reflected the embattled society in which she lived as well as her theological considerations of good and evil (King-Lenzmeier, 2001: 160). However, Hildegard would never have considered such notions of dualism as Fox proposes. In effect, as we have indicated throughout, she has simply become Fox’s ‘mouth piece’ (Newman, 1992: 7).

Fox argues that the recovery of a creation-centred approach has opened our eyes to Hildegard’s rejection of asceticism and her understanding of art as pleasure and wisdom. Indeed, he proffers a list of scholarly academic bibliographies on Hildegard, with the advice that they should be ‘taken with a grain of salt’ if not approached via a creation-centred hermeneutic (1985a: 118). There is wisdom in all creative work, he argues, a sentiment that, according to Fox, Dietrich Bonhoeffer contemplated when he wrote,²⁵

I wonder whether it is possible...to regain the idea of the Church as providing an understanding of the area of freedom (art, education, friendship, play)...? I really think that is so and it would mean that we should recover a link with the Middle Ages. Who is there, for instance, in our times, who can devote himself or herself with an easy mind to

²⁵ Bonhoeffer’s name appears quite frequently in Fox’s writing. The interest and connection appears to be Fox’s Jewish heritage (see Chapter 1 above) and the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis, in common with, Bonhoeffer’s persecution and execution at Flossenbürg concentration camp in 1945.

music, friendship, games, or happiness?²⁶ (1981a: 21; in Bonhoeffer, 1953: 94)²⁷

In his pantheon of creation spirituality celebrities mentioned in *Original Blessing*, as we have seen, Fox awards Hildegard four stars (1983b: 308), which he repeats again in Hildegard's *Book of Divine Works* (1987a: xix-xxi.).²⁸ While Fox and Hildegard have several key themes in common, as Newman argues, others are alien and can only cause confusion. Fox's schema credits Hildegard with many things, especially the rejection of an ascetic spirituality and the recovery of art and pleasure despite the fact that *Scivias* is dedicated to Benedictine values like 'humility, obedience, discipline, moderation, chastity, compunction, and contempt for the world' (Newman, 1992: 7). It seems that Fox was originally intent on claiming that Hildegard's illuminations or mandalas are her own work, and it was only in the book *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* that he eventually agreed that Hildegard probably did not manually create them. While most Hildegardian scholars would credit the inspiration and maybe some of the designs to Hildegard, it would seem that others had a hand in the finished illuminations (1985a: 10; Russell, 1989: 41).

As with much mystical thought, Hildegard's was conservative, That is to say, she held typical medieval views of the subjection of the laity, gender roles and the fate of pagans and unbelievers who were 'deceived by the Devil's lies; their fate was to be cut from the tree of life, like decaying branches, by the sword of the Trinity' (Newman, 1992: 7). Indeed, in complete contrast to what Fox claims, Hildegard writes the following regarding pagans:

in their crimes and the filth of their carnal pollutions, wallowing in
fornication and adultery as a pig wallows in the mud, they were not

²⁶ This quotation originally appeared in 1978a, 'Spirituality for Protestants'.

²⁷ This is taken from *Letters and Papers from Prison*. However, following the phrase (art, education, friendship, play) the ellipsis indicates the omission of — 'so that Kierkegaard's "'aesthetic existence"' would not be banished from the Church's sphere, but would be re-established within it'. It would seem that Fox has taken these words out of context they refer to Kierkegaard's, philosophical definition of the three spheres of existence as the aesthetic, ethical, and religious level.

²⁸ See above, (b) *Meister Eckhart in Passion for Creation*.

willing to be converted to the true faith, and therefore they were divided and separated from life. (*Scivias*, 3.7.6, in Hart and Bishop, 1990: 416)

Fox's grid would ascribe to her a realized eschatology, inclined towards an apocalyptic understanding of the eschaton as a future event. Whereas, Hildegard was 'known throughout the Middle Ages for her apocalyptic prophecies representing the eschaton as a series of world-historical events in the future' (Newman, 1992: 7; see also Kerby-Fulton, 2007) others argue that Hildegard's *Scivias*,

was Augustinian in its apocalypticism, giving a derailed portrait of the final Antichrist but...introduced the notion of a succession of periods before Antichrist. Charles Czarski has shown that Hildegard completely altered her thinking when she wrote her *De operatione dei situe liber diuinorum operum simplicis hominis* the shift must have resulted from Hildegard's disillusionment with the papacy. (Bynum, and Freedman, 2000: 127)²⁹

Meanwhile, while *Illuminations* may be viewed as an attractive book by some, it is more art than scholarship and, as Russell argues, the book divulges more about the 'artist than the model', Fox's very 'skittishness' and the populist nature of his writing elude analysis. Fox's intention is to persuade and convert moreover, 'because he feels it so deeply it must be true' (1989: 40) but Fox has separated Hildegard's visions from their original interpretations and supplanted his own 'psychological interpretation of their symbolic content' (Russell, 1989: 42). Hildegard speaks the words while Fox interprets them because, in his opinion, on occasions, 'prophets do not know what they are saying or doing', and arguably, Hildegard lacked the theology to interpret her own work (1985a: 13–14). When he has de-historicized and de-personalized the visions, Fox is free to interpret and apply them in a wider context than Hildegard intended and this, of course, is typical of contemporary de-traditionalization.

²⁹ See Czarski, (1983, 1999).

Predictably, we are left with a situation in which Hildegard sounds like Eckhart, while Aquinas sounds like Fox, and having endowed these voices from the past with contemporary spiritual sound bites, Fox initiates them into the 'creation-centered tradition culminating in his own theological synthesis' (Newman, 1992: 6; see also, Osborn, 1994: n.p.). Fox's selective editing, Newman argues, raises thorny issues that have to be faced especially in relation to his interpretation of Hildegard:

Does the theologian have a responsibility to the past as well as the present? What is the place of historical theology in contemporary religious thought? Can we create a usable past for ourselves and, at the same time, remain or become historically honest? Is there a timeless core of Christian truth that can and should be stripped of its antiquated garb to be made forever new? What, in fact, is Holy Tradition and how should we use it? (Newman, 1992: 5–10)

Fox has a cavalier attitude to history and, it would appear he is unimpressed with facts. Fox example, we have seen that he willingly depicted Hildegard as a painter, and as Newman argues he '*wants* them to be hers because they are beautiful and because art as meditation is an important part of his program' and central to his concept of creativity (1992: 8; cf. Fox, 1983b: 183, 192, 194, 252). Consequently, in his books and lectures, Hildegard becomes the prime protagonist. 'Fox believes that Hildegard is responsible for the paintings in spirit, and in any case, they embody for him revelations of the sacred so deep and universal that petty questions of authenticity do not matter' and 'historical evidence is subordinated to a higher truth' (Newman, 1992: 8). It seems that Fox has manipulated the culture and context concerning Hildegard and in view of Newman's analysis Fox's supposed translations of Hildegard must be treated, like his work on Eckhart, cautiously and judiciously. We have established that Fox draws on the Rhineland mystics, who he sees as champions of a creation-centred spiritual consciousness. In the next section we will examine Fox's mystical paths.

5. *The Mystical Paths of Creation Spirituality*

Classical theism has viewed God as the Supreme Being who, while being distinguished from creation, is the originator and sustainer of it. However, to read Fox through a traditional lens, expecting a ‘contemporary restatement’ of classical theism, is to miss the point (Osborn: 1994). Fox has rejected the Church, classical theism and Augustine’s dualism in favour of a new creation-centred mysticism, in that,

the idea that God is ‘out there’ is probably the ultimate dualism... All theism sets up a model or paradigm of people here and God out there. All theisms are about subject–object relationships to God, and elsewhere ‘in a panentheistic world view there is no other. God is not other’. (1983b: 89; cf. 1984a: 100)

In support of Fox, Bauckham argues that the Church needs to recover a sense of the world as God’s creation and ourselves as part of that creation. That is to say, without creation, salvation becomes psychological or moralistic, while a correct evaluation fosters a sense of gratitude and blessing (1996: 115–26). Fox calls us to live mystically and prophetically. However, the theological thrust in his mysticism is in the direction of creation and a direct experience of the divine on the mystical paths of creation spirituality which we will examine next.

(a) The Four Paths

Rather than naming the spiritual journey as the Neoplatonic three stages of purgation, illumination and union, Fox defines and describes the four spiritual paths in *Original Blessing* (1983b: 318). These are paths that celebrate the whole of God’s theophany, while circumventing Neoplatonic dualism, which neglects delight, pleasure, creativity and justice and has as its goal contemplation, rather than compassion (Fox, 1978a: 731–36). The four-fold journey describes the sequence of spiralling paths that are aspects of an indistinct, spiritual progression, rather than a linear path with logical stages (Ross, 1989: 8–24). Where might the experience of the divine be found in our time? This is the question Fox is seeking to address and in naming the four paths of creation spirituality;

The *Via Positiva* describes humanity's position in the universe, a mystical union that identifies with the whole, a path of awe and wonder at the mystery of nature. Panentheistically, creation bears the footprint of the divine and is, therefore, holistic and sustaining in contrast to the Fall-redemption model of spirituality (Fox, 1983b: 15, 22, 34, 162). For Fox, this is a spirituality which is 'pleasure loving, pleasure seeking and pleasure sharing' in the 'divine joy' that is fundamental to our human nature (Fox, 1981a: 179). While Fox places joy, pleasure and celebration at the centre of his thought by means of natural ecstasies such as 'nature, friendship, sex, art, sport, thinking, travel involuntary deprivations, celebration and work' (Fox, 1981a: 63) he is not advocating a hedonistic lifestyle. He specifically rejects the perceived effectiveness of ascetic practices over natural ecstasies, despite asceticism's connotation with sainthood and holiness. 'Denying yourself is an indulgence and I don't recommend anything of the kind', he argues. 'It forces us to believe we are doing great things, when in effect we are only fixed within ourselves' (Fox, 1981a: 65). In other words, Fox argues that to liberate First World peoples, there needs to be a *metanoia*, that is a rejection of pleasure seeking and consumerism within Western society. While Israel's relationship with God was at times stormy it ended lovingly because the God of the covenant was a God of blessing. Nonetheless, while the story of blessing permeates Israel's history it also permeates creation and God's creative energy inhabits humankind who, following Israel's example, became a blessing (1983b: 35ff.; 45–46).

The *Via Negativa* describes a journey of interiority, embodied in the silence and emptiness, in the letting go and letting be, and in the pain and suffering that is also a part of the journey (Fox, 1999a: 90). It cultivates the ability to laugh at life, despite the fact that 'pain is everywhere—a deep, ineffable, unfathomable, cosmic pain' that we are to draw energy from, embrace and then let go (Fox, 1983b: 141). There is a social aspect to pain, in that it is experienced by all and draws people together in bonds of charity and compassion. In particular, owning our own suffering is the key to empathizing with others. At the same time, it links us to a cosmic pain, which leads to the *Via Creativa* and a dialectical relation with the divine (Fox, 1983b: 141–47, 151). While there is a profundity here, much of Fox's argument is actually somewhat simplistic. As Ross argues, 'we might wonder how one draws energy from pain' (1989: 12) when pain,

though one may learn to live with it, is all consuming and debilitating (Allik, 1989: 59–61). This is a good point, although, as Fox wants to argue, social support and the manifestation of empathy and sympathy is an invisible power that shapes the nature of society.

The *Via Creativa* is the image of God the Creator in each human and in our creativity; we co-create with God; in our imaginative output, a ‘unique expression in the human gift for birthing’ (1983b: 185). The first two paths unite in the *Via Creativa*, where we are called to befriend creation and our own divinity. This creative dimension demonstrates, for Fox, the truth of Genesis 1:26 and our likeness to the divine (1983b: 180–86). However, Fox does not examine the *imago dei* as it concerns each person and situation. Our creativity is the locus of our likeness to God, but the medieval tradition also stresses that we are made in the image of God ‘by virtue of our ability to love and to know’ (Ross, 1989: 15). While this emphasis on creativity has significant theological and anthropological potential, which, superficially, also has much in common with early Romanticism, however, Fox misses the opportunity to explore it further (Ross, 1989: 15–16). Indeed, I would suggest that a greater familiarity with Romanticism which is lacking in Fox would have helped him here. In particular Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection* (1824) whose broad moral and aesthetic appeal, contributed to American Transcendental thought and was written when new philosophical movements were starting to unsettle the current belief (see Coleridge, 1840).

The *Via Transformativa* is the struggle for homeostasis and a balanced society; the struggle for justice; the relief of suffering; the liberation of ‘First World’ peoples (Fox, 1983b: 250). Linking in with the *Via Negativa*’s emphasis on the social nature of pain, this path emphasizes compassion, which ‘implies passion, pathos and deep caring’. Related to this, he argues, it requires ‘an intellectual life’, in that ‘there can be no justice without ideas and an intellectual life’. In turn, ‘there can be no compassion without an intellectual life, for compassion involves the whole person in the quest of justice and a mind with ideas is an obviously significant portion of any of us’ (Fox, 1999a: 23). Thus, the first three stages along the path find their ‘omega point’ in the *Via Transformativa* and compassion.

Finally, we are, again, called to embrace panentheism, which views the world sacramentally, the primary sacrament being creation itself. We have seen that Fox has rejected classical theism as well as what he considers to be the limitations of revealed theology. Therefore, God as 'Father' is rarely mentioned in Fox's thought, while the title 'Father' is translated as 'Creator' and becomes the principal divine name as we will see.

6. Fox's Understanding of God and Creation

In Fox's thought, the concept of God 'out there' is the principal dualism that divorces God from humanity, while panentheistic immanentism provides a more ecologically sound theological trajectory (1983b: 89). Having said that, Fox's insistence that the traditional doctrines of transcendence have been wholly dualist, in that they view God as fundamentally apart from creation, is distorted and misleading. Indeed, an understanding of immanence and meditation was a common component in the thought of the creation mystics whom he himself includes in his revisionist history of creation spirituality. Rejecting a God who is distinct from the created order, which, for Fox, reinforces the Fall-redemption tradition and undermines a more holistic approach, he insists that there is one creative energy flowing through all space and time (1983b: 36).

Keen argues that Fox's thought has become so creation-centred that he has abandoned the God who is other. Therefore, because God has become a 'quality' or an attribute of creation in Fox's thought, his 'understanding of God has to be interpreted as: nonrealism, paganism or pantheism' (1988: 110–11). Firstly, nonrealism reduces God to being a 'metaphor'. However, as Keen notes, this is not true of Fox, since he frequently references God and Christ in terms of a realist theology. Secondly, Keen argues, Fox is sympathetic to a pagan understanding of the divine in creation because of his close association with paganism (possibly a reference to Starhawk). Nonetheless, while Fox talks about the divinity of certain facets of creation: 'compassion, humans, the feminine, creativity', at the same time, Keen argues, he seeks to be fully creation-centred where everything mirrors the Cosmic Christ (1988: 110–11). Ultimately, because Fox cannot totally divorce creation from God, he does not differentiate and it is the Cosmic Christ

who prevails and, because of this focus, in Keen's opinion, Fox cannot be classified as a pagan.

Keen acknowledges that Fox's intention was to resist pantheism since he is committed to 'opposing injustice, and because pantheism robs God of transcendence' (Fox, 1983b: 90), nonetheless, he concludes that Fox, has dispensed with a transcendent God and this inadvertently has led him into pantheism. Keen's argument stems from what he perceives to be Fox's 'confusion', in that Fox declares that the covenant of Genesis 9 was between 'humankind and creation' rather than 'humankind and God' (1995b: 218, 275). This, Keen argues, is caused by Fox's non-dualistic stance, which prohibits the distinction of God from creation. Nonetheless, by 2002, Keen has changed his mind, in that Fox is no longer a 'non-realist, pagan or pantheist'. Fox's theology in many respects, Keen argues,

overlaps with the liberal tradition. The emphasis is on divine immanence, the primacy of the natural over the supernatural, human experience, salvation as a human achievement rather than a divine work, and God's engagement with the created order rather than a detachment from it. God is defined by our human experience and Fox's panentheism picks up the language of *Honest to God* in rejecting God out there. (2002: 10–29)

Therefore, in Keen's opinion there is no exalted transcendent creator in Fox's thinking. Indeed, while Fox speaks of trusting ourselves, the world, and God trusting us, only once does he state his trust in God. If humanity, he argues, who are made in 'God's image can learn to trust the erotic God then this trust will draw Eros, that is, the twin forces of compassion and creativity out of us and into the task of transforming the world' (Fox, 1983b: 9, 55, 283). However elsewhere, in what seems the direct opposite, Fox argues that a 'sacramental panentheism develops into a transparent diaphanous consciousness wherein we can see events and beings as divine...and the actual name of God becomes less compelling' (Fox, 1983b: 90). The key word is develops, and this is not a denial of God, Fox is referring to contemplative prayer. While vocal prayer is a

prerequisite to the goal of meditation the prayer of silence, which is the subject here, is common to contemplation and found in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and the writings of Thomas Merton, Julian of Norwich, St John of the Cross and specifically the Orthodox Church.

Originally, Keen seems to have misunderstood the very nature of panentheism in that it occupies the middle ground between theism and pantheism given that the world is contained within the Divine, while God is also more than the world. While Fox's thought is profoundly immanentist, convoluted and elusive, he is not 'confused' nor does he systematically analyse his panentheism. In comparison Keith Ward argues that a Christian panentheism may argue that God creates and relates to finite persons who are ethically free while 'neither being constituted by them nor including them nor dictating all their actions' (2004: 70–71). Divine perfection is made real in a 'loving personal relationship...a communion or social unity of persons' (2004: 70–71). Therefore, if we discard the 'model of the universe as the body of God', Ward argues, we are free to emphasize the freedom of finite people combined with an interpersonal, association of love and the 'perfection of God, which does not develop or evolve but does realize itself in relations of empathy and synergy with created persons' (2004: 70–71). While these are not Fox's thoughts, certain themes are held in common. In summary, Ward argues that while God is the 'primary causal agent' humankind within an eschatological panentheism become co-workers with God as part of the body of Christ his hands, his feet and in view of Keen's critique 'his eyes' in communion with divine wisdom (2004: 70–71). Indeed, even within classical theism, ideas and words that are not accompanied by action are empty words and as an 'active love is commanded by scripture', we are called to be 'God's hands and feet on earth' (Posterski, 2004: 41).

Fox presents us with the choice between Fall-redemption and creation-spirituality and, surveying Christian history, he assigns theologians to one camp or the other. However, while we have seen that he argues that Fall-redemption promotes a negative view of creation (1983b: 307–15), he has in fact seriously misidentified the problem and this raises questions regarding both his conclusions and his solution. While Fox promotes St Francis as a star of creation spirituality, Augustine is ignominiously dismissed. Yet,

Augustine, as Atkins argues, exalted the beauty of a creation that revealed God and the work of his hands (1992: 497–506; Augustine, 1955: VII. 11–16). Indeed, his discussion of Augustinian theology and of Fall-redemption theology per se provides a highly misleading polarization. He overemphasizes the tendencies to devalue creation within traditional thought, while his typology of the two traditions is a fallacy. Indeed, it is difficult to determine whether ‘Fox’s rejection of dualism between God and the world is a rejection of *distance* between God and the world or a rejection of *distinction* between God and the world’ (Bauckham, 1996: 124). A theocentric understanding of creation requires humanity and creation to be differentiated from God, but not distanced from God. This is an important conceptual distinction. ‘We find God in *all* things...but we find *God* in all things only by distinguishing all things from God, distinguishing the work of art from the artist...distinguishing the creatures themselves from the divine source of all their being and goodness and beauty’ (Bauckham, 1996: 124). There is a tendency in Fox’s thought (again, a Romantic tendency, evident in Wordsworth and particularly Goethe), which suggests that our relationship with the cosmos is identical to our relationship with God. While he suggests a mystical experience and encourages a sense of awe as we survey the cosmos, the implication is that we are directly encountering God. The glory of the universe is the quintessential element. There is no exalted transcendent creator. Moreover, while he speaks of trusting ourselves, the world, and God trusting us, only once does he state his trust in God. If humanity, he argues, who are made in ‘God’s image can learn to trust the erotic God then this trust will draw Eros out of us and into the task of transforming the world’ (Fox, 1983b: 283). However, Fox also argues that a ‘sacramental panentheism develops into a transparent diaphanous consciousness wherein we can see events and beings as divine...and the actual name of God becomes less compelling’ (Fox, 1983b: 90). The key word is develops, it would seem that Fox is referring to the path of contemplation and while vocal prayer is a prerequisite to the goal of meditation the prayer of silence which is the subject here is common to Thomas Merton, Julian of Norwich, St John of the Cross and specifically the Orthodox Church.

(a) Dabhar: *The Creative Energy of God the Verb*

Both Osborn and Keen highlight Fox's frequent use of the Hebrew word *Dabhar*, which he translates as the creative energy of God revealed in creation, rather than 'word', its etymological meaning. *Dabhar* is also explicitly intertwined in Fox's thinking with creativity, compassion, the love of life, fertility (Fox, 1983a: 37–38) and *eros* in both its 'outpouring, ejaculative aspect and its unitive, copulative, aspect' (Fox, 1983a: 53). *Dabhar* is the 'great event' within Fox's revived spirituality. Dualism and separation are classified as sin, as they 'refuse to give birth', they 'refuse to spiral' (a reference to Fox's understanding of linear and cyclical versus spiral time and deoxyribonucleic acid),³⁰ and consequently they hinder God's cosmogenic process (Fox, 1983b: 214).³¹ The encounter with the presence of God in our depth and of *Dabhar* in all the blessing and the sufferings of life, Fox argues, is mystical:

our goal is to expand, to 'ripen', as St. Irenaeus would say, to grow into fullness...and compassion. Creativity, the divine power of *Dabhar*, is so powerful and so overwhelming in us that we simply cannot deny it, cannot keep it down. If we are not consciously bent on employing it for life's sake, it will emerge on its own for the sake of destruction. (Fox, 1983b: 111–12)

The Hebrew interpretation of *Dabhar* was more vigorous than its counterpart in the Greek. The divine word was conceived as a dynamic entity, a creative force that directed and controlled events. The human spoken word was also endowed with the similar if lesser qualities. The power resided in the word itself, not the speaker, as evidenced in blessings, curses, promises or threats (Gen. 27). Fox's tendency to emanationism, Osborn argues, is also clear from his 'account of creativity and compassion...the polar aspects of Fox's God: the twin forces which drive cosmogenesis' (1994). Indeed, Osborn argues that

³¹ See Chapter 4, §2, The Cyclical Pattern That Connects.

Fox is simply following in the footsteps of Roman Catholic tradition since Aquinas. However, as Barth pointed out, the danger with such an approach is that it is vulnerable to distortion: that which is self-evidently obvious to a culture is regarded as natural and through natural theology may be projected onto God. By rejecting the association of *Dabhar* with 'word', Fox detaches it from its association with morality and order. It becomes the unqualified amoral creative self-outpouring of God: it is the force that drives the outward movement of divine emanation. Small wonder that the imagery of giving birth should seem so appropriate. (1994)

However, Fox's concept of God as verb is not unique to his theology, in that it is rooted, once again, in covenantal theology and the story of the commissioning of Moses to lead Israel to the promise land (Ex. 3), as well as the *kabbalah* and Jewish mystical thought, where deity is understood as a 'sense of being', a process, not an object or subject in contrast to Christianity's more anthropomorphic concept of God. Similarly to Fox, drawing on the teachings of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, David Cooper defines 'God' and 'creation' as an interactive verb. 'God-ing' and 'creation-ing' are not 'things' that exist, they are creative activities—in that 'every aspect of creation is in process and continuously unfolding like an infinite flower' (1997: 75). Thus, the focus changes from a noun to a verb and from subject to predicate, from God as a person to the quality of Godliness. Again, Reconstructionist Judaism, under the influence of Mordecai Kaplan, has also viewed God as a power or process that worked through nature and human beings. Kaplan developed a religious philosophy that was rooted in reason and community. 'God becomes the impulse for goodness...within society...and the inclination to justice goodness and peace... He is the "natural religious impulse" within human beings' (Ariel, 1995: 46). Likewise, Fox in his pursuit of social justice, has abandoned the Fall-redemption paradigm that, he asserts, views faith as 'private' and understands humanity's relationship with a theistic understanding God as vertical. His renascent approach, Fox argues, moves the dimension of faith into the political socialist

arena ('God and us') and perceives our relationship to God as 'horizontal and concentric... God is all in all and all is in God' (2001a: xxii–xxiii).

A long time ago, I remember hearing of a child who had just sat through *Star Wars* asking, 'Mum, Dad, is the Force the same thing as God?' This concept of God as a verb or energy conjures up 'the force' as depicted in the *Star Wars* movies (Mattingly, 2002). However, the point is that, Fox is concerned that the figurative depiction of the transcendent and patriarchal God has become anachronistic and powerless. At the heart of the issue is the theological problem of how God is ontologically related to the world. Fox argues that we experience *God* in *creation* as the 'grace of creation...the gift of creation' (1981c: 220). Thus, the universe becomes a creative force and a primal mystery into which, as we will see the mystic must enter (Fox, 1988: 40).

7. Contemplating the Mystical Dimensions in Fox's Spirituality

Fox's mysticism is retrospective it is not introspective, in that he argues his four paths and new mystical sacred dimension will blow away the cobwebs of a dead religiosity that poses as faith/church. In a new paradigm that encourages birthing and a common dialectic within the mystical spirituality, which acknowledges our need to address issues that call for justice to our fellow travellers and the earth. Periodically, we forget that Fox's primary goal was a for a global village way of thinking, which would replace the luxury driven, egotistical American society where even sensuality has become the result of consumerism (1981a 4, 25–26). To this end, commenting on the American culture and, in a parody of René Descartes' *Cogito, ergo sum*, Fox exclaimed that the American philosophy is 'I buy, therefore I am, I consume therefore I exist' (1997a: 262).

Does Fox's argument address the key issues he objects to within the hedonistic isolationist California? Santmire has serious reservations. He argues that his mystical liberation theology has deficiencies, in that, while Fox's rhetoric may appeal to an 'elitist and affluent' strand of society, his thinking appears to offer little to the disadvantaged urban poor of America's inner-cities. Fox, Santmire argues, 'leaves us in the sweat lodge. His thought, is not fundamentally at home in urban America' (2000: 46–47; cf. Boulton, 1990: 428–32). Undeniably, the response to what may be termed a

traditional liberation theology, has been subdued in the northern hemisphere (Pattison, 1994: 3) and Fox's argument stands uncomfortably in stark contrast to a third world calling for liberation from poverty and oppression. However, Santmire also argues that Fox's approach 'resonates all too disquietingly with the anti-urban, romantic individualism of the Thoreauvian tradition' (2000: 46–47) and, because others have also connected Fox with the mystical naturalism, we will now examine this aspect of Fox's spirituality.

(a) Fox, the Romantic Mystic

The tension between the transcendence and immanence of God, and the tendency to emphasize one attribute over the other has been, in the past, a perennial issue within theology (Cairns, 1967: 11). However, Donald G. Bloesch has argued that the dominant transcendence has been replaced by a trend towards immanentism. The theological ambience within today's theology, he argues, has rejected 'discursive reasoning' for a more 'particular rather than universal', 'biocentric' and 'experiential' form of earth mysticism (Bloesch, 2006: 12, 242–43). Theologians in this new spirituality include Whitehead, Hartshorne and Teilhard de Chardin. Meanwhile, the movement has influenced Bultmann, Cobb, Ruether, Fiorenza, McFague, and Fox. This new trend is a 'synthesis of religious tradition with modern romanticism and naturalism' that, Bloesch argues, has produced a 'post-Christian Mysticism' (2006: 242, 246). It is the spirituality that has much in common with Fox's thought and has much in common with the neo-Romantic elements that we have already encountered in Robert Bly and the mythopoetic movement (2006: 248). Hence, with some justification, we might argue that Fox has been less influenced by the Christian tradition than he has by a movement that attempted to redefine the place of humanity and the sacred in nature. The early naturalists, such as Henry Thoreau, John Muir and John Burroughs, all attested in various ways to the moral, healing, sustaining and spiritual power of nature. A belief that was founded on their 'deistic understanding of untouched nature as being a medium for experiencing the First Cause of the universe that...they equated with divinity' (Meikle, 1985; cf. Alexander, 1981c: 386–400). This trend towards an environmental neo-Romanticism is also identified by Wayne Boulton who underlines the fact that Fox's writing shares the

same distinctive ideas and sense of ‘God in all and all in God’ that has significant continuities with American transcendentalism (1991: 269–78). Similarly David Keen is correct to note that Fox picks up on many of the themes of the Romantic movement of the early 1800s (1999: 2–4). The poetry of the English Romantics, notably Byron, Keats, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Blake, all express in various ways the moral, healing, sustaining and spiritual power of nature. Romanticism did not regard theology, philosophy and art as separate spheres. Indeed, the sacred and the secular cannot be distinguished as easily as Christian theology has, in various ways, sought to argue. As with much New Age thought, in many respects Fox is philosophically neo-Romantic.

Immanence, the sense of the divine within, and sustaining the universe, was foundational to the poetry of Goethe, Shelley and Coleridge and this ennobling of nature came to be accepted as the path of knowledge that could lead to communion with the sacred whole. Indeed, in Goethe’s work, we begin to see the beginning of modern individualism (Swales, 2002: 1–10, 125ff.) and Fox argues that Goethe in the ‘The Holy Longing’ encapsulates the connection between ‘art, death, and the spiritual journey’, which he seeks:

I praise what is truly alive,
What longs to be burned to death.

In the calm water of the love—nights,
Where you were begotten, where you have begotten,
A strange feeling comes over you
When you see the silent candle burning.

And as long as you haven’t experienced
This to die and so to grow
You are only a troubled guest
On the dark earth (2002b: 127–28)

As Sam Keen commented, ‘it sounds a lot like pantheism, Romanticism, nature mysticism or the transcendentalism of Henry David Thoreau or Ralph W. Emerson’ (1989). Fox, in reply, dismissed this analysis:

There is an important difference. There are basically only four ways that we can think about our relation to divinity. Theism means there is a God who is up there in the sky...atheism, which is a reaction to and rejection of theism...pantheism, which says that everything is God and God is everything. The church has always rejected this because it leaves out the transcendence, or the surprise, of God and panentheism, which says the image of God or divinity, is immanent in all things but that God transcends the created order. This doesn’t lock God into what already is. (Fox, quoted in Keen, 1989)

As a rule, panentheism preserves the transcendent or vertical dimension of faith. However, Fox’s symbolism and speech about God is consistently horizontal. God is to be found, as Osborn comments, ‘within the world within human consciousness’ (1993: 73; cf. 1994). Indeed, Fox’s use of the God–world relationship as a parallel to the relationship between mind and body is also problematic (Fox, 1991a: 63–65; Osborn, 1994: n.p.). This mind–body dualism has been a perennial philosophical problem. As Descartes put it,

there is a great difference between mind and body, in as much as body is by nature always divisible, and mind is entirely indivisible. For when I consider the mind, or myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing, I am unable to distinguish many parts within myself; I understand myself to be something quite single and complete. Although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, I recognize that if a foot or an arm or any other part of the body is cut off nothing has thereby been taken away from the mind. (Descartes in Martinich, 2007: 121)

However, again the analogy is problematic. The suggestion that God is related to the world as mind is to body raises a question: How is the mind related to the body? Fox uses this question to make his holistic point (Fox, 1991a: 63–65; Osborn, 1994), thereby transposing the problem into theology:

Fox clearly cannot accept a dualistic solution. Similarly, he claims to reject a pantheistic solution in which God and world are co-equal, different aspects of the one reality. Presumably, he would be equally dissatisfied with a materialistic solution which would deny ultimate reality to mind and God. But the remaining alternative would give mind and God a priority over physical reality which would be equally unpalatable. In practice, the easiest option for panentheists is to slide towards an unacknowledged pantheism. (1994: n.p.)

Fox's objective is a renewed mystical creation. Hence, as Meikle argues, creation has become 'the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega' (1985: 25) while the quality of compassion, becomes the ultimate experience of the spiritual life. This, however, does little more than state that Fox, critical of dualism, has sought to develop a way of doing theology and being a Christian that takes God's involvement with the created order and with the dark side of history, its suffering and pain, seriously.

8. Conclusion

Having called a moratorium on Fall-redemption theology, Fox employs Christian imagery and metaphor to direct our gaze towards creation. The main thrust of his argument may be defined as a liberation struggle on behalf of creation, which complements contemporary thinking with its earth-centred orientation. Catholicism has a long history of mystical spirituality. However, in the last three decades, Fox, Berry, Swimme and others have endeavored to formulate a spirituality that celebrates God's presence in the materiality of the natural world.

Fox's four paths strike a positive and necessary contemporary note, in that he anchors his deliberations in humanity within the created order. This is especially so in relation to

his panentheism, which he places in the context of a cosmic interconnectedness, while highlighting the progressive nature of human transformation. Meanwhile, his new spirituality channels our energies into a global social ethic that addresses the world's critical environmental, social and cultural challenges while honouring mystical awe and wonder. Emphasizing our capacity to be mystics and prophets, Fox suggests a way of living and being that leads to self-understanding. This, in turn, develops a self-knowledge, which enables us to fulfil our natures and potential to grow in the likeness of God. This type of thinking is not unusual in contemporary practical and pastoral theologies (see Ross, 1989: 8–24; Allik, 1989: 54–72).

More negatively, Fox's whimsical flamboyant approach leads him into the trap of telling his readers where they should be, without filling in the details of how to get there. Indeed, in many respects, his lack of rigour leads to confusion. He fails to clarify what exactly he means by mysticism, and neither does he enlighten us as to what he imagines the prophetic response to be. He plays fast and loose with mystical texts for his own purpose, rather than submitting his thought to serious critical scholarship. His work is, to say the least, hermeneutically naïve.

It is, however, Fox's overemphasis on individualism and his inadequate response to the problem of human suffering and the brokenness of creation that might be considered to raise the most significant concerns. The dialectic throughout the spiritual process that Fox engages in aspires to healing and celebration. Yet again, he does not expand on how this healing is actualized (Ross, 1989: 8–24). As Ross has argued, while Fox engages with individual, communal and even cosmic pain one cannot be certain that he truly enters into the pathos of humanity's suffering on the *Via Transformativa* (1989: 8–24). Fox argues that the 'divine power of creativity can become "demonic" if used for bad ends' (1983b: 232). However, as Keen argues, Fox's God is so closely entwined with the created order that it is 'difficult for Fox to differentiate good from evil within the being of God', who appears to have no ethical inclination or 'enforceable will' (Keen, 2002: 24). Fox does not consider the connection between evil and suffering, even in the form of oppression and the systematic exclusion of those of a different race, gender or

political persuasion by those in power, which is central to the concerns of the liberation theology which he seeks to articulate (Ross, 1989: 8–24; Allik, 1989: 54–72).

Traditionally, understanding God as creator is to say that there is a divine mind and a divine purpose underlying the whole of cosmic history. As we have already noted, the question is whether God is distinguishable from creation. However, Fox's propensity to equate 'God with creation' fails to differentiate and 'recover the sense of God as Creator and of nature as creation' (Bauckham, 1996: 124). The Judeo-Christian tradition holds a deeply rooted belief that all creatures exist for *the glory of God* and *reflect the glory of God*. They reflect and point us beyond creation to the one who creates and transcends them. Thus, in Bauckham's opinion, Fox robs all creatures of their 'real integrity...if they are required to stand in for God' (1996: 126). Fox's thought is creation-centred rather than creator-centred. The divine Artist indwells, but remains distinguishable within his creation, while all created beings are other than God, valuable in his eyes while exercising free will. Fox's thesis that we can only respect and value God's creatures and nature if they are inherently divine is clearly flawed. The whole diversity of nature, in and of itself, has an unconditional value by virtue of its creaturehood. Part of the problem with Fox is that, it is not clear whether this is the case if nature is divinized (see Bauckham, 1996: 115–26). Indeed, Fox quotes Meister Eckhart as saying, 'God loves all creatures as God... God enjoys all creatures, not as creatures, but enjoys the creatures as God' (1988a: 123). This can hardly be considered a paean to creation on its own terms. Surely God creates because he loves and values creatures as creatures not as God.

Both, French and Macquarrie agree that today's creation-centred theology is mainly undergirded by Chardin's ideas, particularly his emphasis on the 'strict continuity between humanity and nature, mind and matter'. This rejection of anthropocentrism allows him to oppose an ethic of the stewardship of nature (French, 1990: 48–72; Macquarrie, 1972: 122–26). Again, Fox has much in common with Berry and Swimme and in that they also seek to recover the concept that revelation may be found in nature as well as the Bible (Fox, 2002c: 1–7). The title Cosmic Christ has gained relevance

especially in relation to Mysticism with Fox's spirituality and it is to this topic that this study now turns.

Chapter 4

From the Historical Jesus to the Cosmic Christ

1. Introduction

For Fox, the key to a renewed spirituality, as we have seen, lies in humanity's return to a mystical spiritual consciousness and to an understanding of the Cosmic Christ as the 'omnipresence of the Divine one in all things' (1988a: 8). We will explore these issues, in this chapter, by way of Matthew Fox's understanding of the historical Jesus to his omega-point, the Cosmic Christ. While Fox has no issues with Jesus' teachings and life, it is obvious that he has problems concerning the traditional understanding and interpretation of Christ's status. The search is based primarily on three books, *Original Blessing* (1983b), *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (1988a) and *Creation Spirituality* (1991a). Following an analysis of Fox's interpretation of time and the historical Jesus, we will examine his quest for the historical evidence for a Cosmic Christ tradition in the Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament and the Church Fathers. Finally, we will turn our attention to Fox's interpretation of *Sophia*, 'Lady Wisdom', who, he argues, is making a, much-needed and much-heralded return to our spiritual cognizance. We will end by analysing his interpretation of Jesus as a conduit for wisdom and divinity. However, to begin with we will examine Fox's understanding of the 'pattern that connects' and its application to Fox's understanding of the Jesus of history and the Cosmic Christ.

Gregory Bateson, the American Anthropologist who was searching for the 'pattern that connects' all living things, posed the question, 'What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all the four of them to me? And Me to you? And all six of us to the amoeba in one direction and to the backward schizophrenic in another?' (1979: 16–17). The answer to Bateson's question, according to Fox, is found not in the quest for the historical Jesus but in the Cosmic Christ tradition of loving justice ingrained in the witness of the New Testament and discerned in all the world's wisdom traditions and, therefore, germane to all people as recorded in Paul's hymn to the Colossians (1988a: 133).

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. (NRSV, Col. 1:15–16)

This, says Fox, is reflected in Teilhard de Chardin's work, in that 'Christ, through his incarnation is internal to the world, rooted in the world, even in the very heart of the tiniest atom' (1988a: 129). Fox's objective is a cosmic mystical union, in personal, individual and social terms, with the divine transcendent Cosmic Christ, which will become manifest in a spiralling interconnected universe which we will examine next.

2. The Cyclical Pattern That Connects

While Fox quips that 'Jesus did not have Jesus Christ written on his driver's licence',¹ he also argues that it is only,

the coming together of the historical Jesus and the Cosmic Christ that will make Christianity whole at last... Christianity has been out of touch with its 'core', its center. Perhaps a new 'ecumenical council' will be forthcoming in our lifetime...that would call forth the wisdom of all the world's religions. (1988a: 7)

In Fox's thought, creation-centred spirituality is cosmic, open, seeking and explorative of humanity, creatures and the entire cosmos (1983b: 69). Indeed, he argues, 'the more deeply one sinks into our cosmic existence the more fully one realizes the truth that there does not exist an inside and an outside cosmos but rather one cosmos: we are in the cosmos and the cosmos is in us' (1983b: 69). Nonetheless, we have retreated from the divine and our connection with the earth. The blame for this retreat is located in the work of Augustine of Hippo, the mechanistic outlook of the mathematician and physicist Isaac Newton, in conjunction with the repression of consecutive authoritarian Popes who incongruously, with politicians (specifically the White House and the Politburo), have

¹ In 'The Quest for the Cosmic Christ', Audiotape from Friends of Creation Spirituality, Oakland, CA, 1989 (in Jackson, 2004: Section IV).

declared themselves the ‘rulers of the universe’ (Fox, 1983b: 75).² Fox has also rejected the Western chronological linear view of time, which is a distinct feature of Judaism and Christianity, in favour of the spiral, interconnected and overlapping paths he proposes within creation spirituality (1999a: 87, 97).³ Augustine, and consequently the Western Church, continued this theological linear understanding, arguing that all the important events in the Bible clearly only happened once (Gilkey, 1988: n.p.). Subsequently, the Medieval church, while working and living within a cyclical orientated world view continued to understand theology as linear and the ‘unfolding of God’s will’ from a specific point in time to an allegorical omega point. Theologically, time began with ‘paradise lost and ended with paradise regained’. It was not understood as an ‘unending circle’ of reincarnation (Gillespie, 2008: 3). Jürgen Moltmann also speaks of a linear irreversible time in relation to the three Abrahamic religions, in that the Israelites’ experience of God is portrayed as a journey out of Egypt via a covenant of hope moving towards an unknown future.

Whoever follows this covenant of God and begins with hope leaves a past behind which does not return and to which one cannot return; and they seek a future which is not yet. One’s present experience of God separates time into a past which cannot be restored and a future which has not been reached... Only whatever is present *is* in the ontological sense. Whatever can be future is not yet. Whatever is past, is no longer...eternal life begins here and now in the midst of transitory time. (Moltmann, 2000: 28)

² Fox’s ideas irritate at times and, while he rightly accuses some fundamentalist Christians of harbouring conspiracy theories (2008a: 260), this throwaway remark is a ‘conspiracy theory’ that seems to have more in common with the fictional *Da Vinci Code* and its concept of a malign fundamentalist Catholic conspiracy.

³ Indeed, linguistic studies prove that, while Jewish and Christian thinking developed and melded, the pervasive Greek philosophy was influencing the young church and it became imperative that the church elders should highlight the differences between them. Sharp lines of differentiation were drawn between concrete and abstract thinking. Again, the Greek concept of immortality, which was focussed on the emancipation of the soul, at death, undermined the Christian teaching on the resurrection of the body. In addition, Greek culture held to the concept of cyclical time, while Judaism accepted a linear understanding rather than perpetual recurrences, in that time moves from event to event towards a goal (Brown, 1990a: 63).

In contrast with Eastern religions, where we exchange, the ‘experience of reality as history with an irreversible time-structure—there the insight into the great and small cycles of the eternal return of these same cycles; here the experience of historical existence spread out between memory and hope...[and] the Buddha resting within himself with closed eyes, deep in the inner experience of the eternal present’ (Moltmann, 2000: 28).

Nonetheless, Fox, having viewed the cross in linear terms, rejects it. Turned on its side, he argues, the cross becomes a sword, which, historically, represents intolerance, the ‘Crusades, inquisitions, witch burnings—that invariably meant the burning of old women—Jew burnings and pogroms, burnings of heretics and gay people, of fellow Christians and of infidels’ (1999a: 112). Consequently, Fox embraces the symbol of the empty tomb and discards linear time as presumed within the Bible.⁴ Turning to a spatial and spiral understanding that, he argues, is clearly distinguished from a mere repetitive cyclical view of the universe, which is the essence of Eastern philosophy. This concept of a spiral, he proposes, represents the double helix model of DNA⁵ within molecular biology, the basis of all physical life, which also embodies the foundation for our spiritual life (1999a: 113–14).⁶ Spiral time, like dancing Sarah’s circle rather than climbing Jacob’s ladder, Fox argues, is historical, cyclical, receptive dynamic, a group activity that importantly has the properties of connectivity (1999a: 87, 97).

Lawrence Osborn, while concluding that Fox’s roots are deeply embedded within Roman Catholicism and, in the face of ‘Fox’s move from rationality to creativity’ argues that he has moved closer to Origen’s thought (1995: n.p.). Having said that, there are only two references to Origen in Fox’s writing, largely, because he finds Origen deeply dualistic while he is particularly critical of Origen’s interpretation of Song of Songs and

⁴ Theological concept of time has moved away from this rather simplistic understanding in that the idea of teleological and cyclical time is no longer considered contradictory (Rosen, 2004: 111). It seems odd that Fox makes no mention of the Book of Ecclesiastes, nor the fifty-year cycles of Jubilee, when a year of rest was to be observed by the Israelites during which slaves were to be set free, alienated property restored to the former owners, and the lands left untilled.

⁵ Deoxyribonucleic acid is the molecule, which encodes genetic information and determines the structure, function and behaviour of cells (Alberts, 2009: 213, 233).

⁶ Fox’s theory of spiral time pervades esoteric Scientific/Religious and ecological theories. However, I was unable to establish any conclusive proof from within the academic scientific community.

his subsequent self-mutilation (1999b: 31, 320). Teilhard de Chardin, on the other hand, unlike Fox, did attempt to reconcile Origen's writing with classical trinitarian and christological doctrines of logos theology (Lyons in McVey, 1983: 458–60). It could be argued that Origen was a Christian Platonist because he found the 'Platonic idiom of his day capable of expressing the truth of the Gospel' (Greer, 1979: 6). The same could be argued, with regard to Fox, in that, he is a Christian Panentheist who utilizes New Age ideas because this mode of reflection expresses a theology, with which a late-modern world can engage. Having established that Fox's thinking is panentheistic and spiral, we will now turn our attention to his understanding of the quest for the historical Jesus.

3. The Historical Jesus: The Word or a Nature Mystic

Central to Fox's thesis is his argument that the intense critique of biblical scholarship that developed during the Enlightenment obliterated the Cosmic Christ from our consciousness and spirituality. Subsequently, this neglect was compounded by the development of modernism in America, which was more intense and polarized than in Britain. This movement was the precursor of the Social Gospel movement, which sprang from a religious liberal perspective that encouraged a social stance. While conservative and orthodox thinkers were isolated from the vagaries of modernism, the perceived threat of Liberal Protestantism led directly to persecution, 'heresy trials' and eventually to the rise of a fundamentalism, in which the 'inerrancy of scripture was a principal bastion to be held against liberal onslaughts' (Welch, 2003: 165–66, 224; Marty, 1997: 303–305).

This aspect of American religiosity fuelled Fox's total and radical antipathy towards what he terms a 'Christofascist' fundamentalism. In *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* he accuses Western culture of being involved in 'matricide...ecocide, genocide, suicide and decide' all in the name of a 'sodomasochistic...fundamentalist church...and a patriarchy gone mad' (1988a: 17, 27–28). Fundamentalism is a 'pseudo-community ...one that is built on hatred of other groups, scapegoating and fear. Fundamentalism is always "us against them", which makes for an intense bonding among the "us". Fundamentalism is also driven by an intense salvation compulsion— so and so saves me

from ever—present sin’ (Fox, 2006b: 132). Accordingly, progressive Christians need to initiate the Luther-like divorce from fundamentalist thinking. Let them have ‘the church, with its buildings and museums, its debts and payouts for paedophile offenders. We who believe otherwise and are not fundamentalists will take Christ’ (Fox, 2006a: 54). Consequently, Fox advocates a move away from the traditional images of the historical Jesus in order to concentrate on the Cosmic Christ within.

The variety of designations, which Fox utilizes for ‘Jesus’ or ‘Christ’ in his writing is both complicated and tortuous and in his first two books, *Prayer: A Radical Response to Life*, and *Whee!*, Fox does not differentiate between his designations of ‘Jesus’, ‘Christ’ or ‘Jesus Christ’.

Nevertheless, where he uses the name ‘Jesus’ he is actually referring to the man the historical Jesus while the second designation ‘Christ or Jesus Christ’ refers to the man Jesus as an incarnation of the Cosmic Christ. No matter which designation he uses, Fox is referring to the historical Jesus of the New Testament (Keen, 1988: 24, 97). However, it was Fox’s third book, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, which became foundational to the eventual development of his Cosmic Christ Christology. Moreover, the third title of ‘Cosmic Christ’, which appears in his later writing does not refer to the Jesus of traditional understanding, it is the ‘cosmic principle’ (Keen, 1988: 24) although, by the time Fox wrote *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, Jesus had become a distinct human model, while the Christ became Cosmic (1997a: 152–54).

(a) In the Beginning: The Word

The Jesus, which Fox introduces in *Prayer* (2001a [1976]), is identified as the *logos* of the Father. However, he argues, while humanity’s relationship to a theistic God within the Fall-redemption tradition is primarily vertical (‘God is up, humankind below’), within creation spirituality, the emphasis changes: humankind’s relationship to God is understood panentheistically (‘God is horizontal and concentric in its meeting places’) (2001a: xxiii). Subsequently, the Jesus we encounter in *Whee!* (1981a), which explores the importance of ecstasy in the spiritual life, is very different to the Jesus portrayed in *Prayer* published in 1976. The Western tradition, Fox argues, developed a spirituality

tainted by chauvinism, repression, anti-Semitism, an asensual ethos fostered by the influence of, among others, Marcion and Denis the Pseudoareopagite. Nonetheless, while he endorses a return to St Francis and Aquinas' sensual spiritual perspective, Fox surprisingly, rejects Teilhard de Chardin, judging him to be 'chauvinistic, dualistic and ultimately afraid of the sensual' (1981a: 202–203, 212, 214).

In contrast, Fox embraces the sensual while rejecting the concept of an ascetic personal mysticism. Seeking to merge the spiritual and the sensual on the journey to God he considers the differences between natural ecstasies (like sex) and tactical ecstasies (like meditation). 'We shall become ecstatic together or else we'll become extinct together', he declares, and thus, like Jesus we will become sensual (1981a: 5, 20, 41). If we let go of our Hellenistic presuppositions, he argues, it becomes obvious that the 'Jewish soul' echoes through the Bible and this Jewish thinking, which is biblically based, was also Jesus' thinking. The Bible takes it for 'granted that the sensual is a blessing and that there is no (spiritual) life without it. All life is spiritual for the biblical lover of God's creation' (Fox, 1981a: 11), and our sensory capabilities monitor the environment, which we share with the prophets and their descendent Jesus of Nazareth. These shared sensate experiences include the following:

- *touch* for holding; caressing; hugging; arousing; forgiving; healing....
- *sight* for drinking in colors of rainbows and paints and oceans and bodies black, yellow, red, white, brown...
- *bearing* of birds chirping and leaves touching and voices speaking and music announcing and silence and waves lapping;
- *smell* of lilac trees when you least expect it, of honey, of the sea, of freshly cut grass or hay, of roses, of bodies, of a winter day;
- *taste* of cookies, of rose d'anjou, of honey bread, of halibut, of lobster, of fresh salad, of Italian pasta... (1981a: 186)

Jesus was a consummate narrator of parabolic tales to which his listeners could relate. Challenged by his disciples on his use of parables, Jesus answered,

To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given... The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand' (Matt, 13:10–14)

Jesus' ploy concealed the truth from the sceptics, while it was clearly revealed to his followers. It seems to have been a form of teaching he adopted when the tide of opposition was beginning to rise, thus enabling him to continue (Brown, 1993: 605). Fox however, argues that *this* stands for more than it sounds. 'He is himself a parable "I am the truth" said Jesus' (1981a: 115). However, he continues, if *Jesus* is also the *parable* of God, it is a weighty thought that, in like manner, we also are parables of God to the extent that we think symbolically. Where others would proclaim that Jesus Christ is at the centre of the post-Easter kerygma Fox rejects the classical kerygmatic traditions however, as James Dunn argues, it is much more 'difficult to speak of an unity between the post-Easter kerygma and the kerygma of Jesus and at the level of public proclamation' (1990: 30–31). The contrasts are obvious:

- Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom, the first Christians proclaimed Jesus.
- Jesus called for repentance and faith with respect to the kingdom, the first Christians called for faith in Jesus.
- Jesus held out the offer of God's forgiveness and acceptance, the first Christians held out the same offer but as mediated through Jesus. (Dunn, 1990: 30–31, Dunn, 1989: 254)

For Bultmann also, the historical Jesus is merely the 'Christ after the flesh' (2 Cor. 5:16) while the Christ of faith is he who comes in the proclamation of the gospel (Bultmann, 2007: 238–39). The Gospel narratives did not shed light on the life of Jesus but on the *Sitz im Leben* of the Church (Bultmann, 1972: 55), Jesus confronts humanity in the *kerygma*.

It is therefore illegitimate to go behind the kerygma, using it as a 'source', in order to reconstruct a 'historical Jesus' with his 'messianic consciousness', his 'inner life' or his 'heroism'. That would be merely 'Christ after the flesh', who is no longer. It is not the historical Jesus, but Jesus Christ, the Christ preached, who is the Lord'. (Bultmann, 1969: 268)

In effect, there is no such thing as 'pure naked historical information' concerning any historical figure. Nonetheless, we have to concede that for Jesus' earliest followers the 'Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith' would have described the 'man they knew' (Kahler, 1964: 2–3, 66). Moreover, since Jesus has led the way we who follow, to the extent that we undertake the God-like process of thinking symbolically, also become parables. 'Symbolic consciousness is cosmic consciousness... This is my body. Passing from an I-consciousness to a We-consciousness' that means experiencing the pain of others (Fox, 1981a: 117). Faith, according to Fox, comes in two volumes: nature, which comprises the world we live and interact with via our five senses and the Bible, in which there is a mystical nature/Wisdom tradition, which, according to scholars, was the tradition of the historical Jesus (2002c: 3). Indeed,

one prevalent theory by scholars today, being illegitimate or being considered such, Jesus was excluded from the synagogue as a child, so he went out and played in nature while others were praying in a building and that's what radicalized him. And it comes through in all of his parables, all of his teaching. They are nature-based. It's wisdom literature. Wisdom literature is not based on reading books, while Jesus, no doubt, was illiterate. (Fox, 2002c: 3)

In effect, according to Fox, 'eighty five percent of the scriptures are about the Christ rather than Jesus' and in fact the young church was so confident of their own experience of the Christ, which was awakened by Jesus, that they put words into his mouth that they thought he might, ought, should and would have uttered (Fox, 1997a: 153). Having examined Fox's initial Christology in his first two books we will now turn to *Original*

Blessing, where, as David Keen has noted, the argument becomes even more convoluted since the reader is faced with three contradictory permutations where we meet both the historical Jesus as well as the Cosmic Christ (1988: 97–98).

(b) Jesus: An Original Blessing?

In *Original Blessing*, as Keen has argued, we have to consider three elements: the Jesus who is divine by nature and the Jesus who is a channel for divine grace. Subsequently, in the third facet of Fox's thought, we are introduced to the concept that humanity has the potential to become divine, because Jesus is divine and in the next section, we will examine these three ideas.

(i) The Jesus who is divine by nature. There are indications of a pre-existent Jesus in *Original Blessing* (Theme 10) where Fox addresses salvation, Christ, the *Via Positiva* and a theology of creation and incarnation. Our understanding of salvation, he argues, is dependent on our understanding of sin. The awakening of love or *Eros* on the *Via Positiva* is salvific, as Eckhart said, 'this then is salvation: to marvel at the beauty of created things and praise the beautiful providence of their creator' (1983b: 120–21). Salvation brings justice; it is a holistic interaction with earth, air, fire and water that will heal the cosmos. This integration and making whole is a return to our origins while the '*Via Positiva* offers deep invitations to examine anew our pre-existence, both in the historical unfolding of the cosmos and in the Creator's heart' (Fox, 1983b: 120–21). Embracing *Thanatos* is a sin, choosing *Eros* is salvation from sin that Irenaeus and Julian of Norwich called a second creation, a rebirth for humanity. At this point, Fox, to confirm his argument, turns to Norman O. Brown's controversial psychoanalytical theory of culture and history. Brown argues that the challenging question facing humankind is the abolition of repression.

In traditional Christian language, this [the abolition of repression], he says, is referred to in the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. We have already...extracted from psychoanalytical theory a model of what the resurrected body would be like. The life instinct...demands activity...[that] can only be called play...a union with others and with

the world...based...on narcissism and erotic exuberance... The death instinct is reconciled with the life instinct only in a life which is not repressed...the death instinct then being affirmed in a body which is willing to die. And, because the body is satisfied, the death instinct no longer drives it to change itself and make history, and therefore, as Christian theology divined, its activity is in eternity... Christian theology and psychoanalysis agree—the resurrected body is the transfigured body. (1985: 307–308)

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to construct a traditional understanding of the resurrection from Fox's thought. Jesus the pathfinder 'overcomes death by confronting his fear of it' (Keen 1988: 98). Thus, in order that the cycle may continue, humanity embraces its own divinity and liberty in order to become images of God while at the same time discarding a fear of death. Thomas E. Clark argues that these unconventional expositions of our basic creeds have developed with the emergence of a creation spirituality model. With this new exposition a 'materialistic understanding of personal resurrection has yielded...to a focus on the transformed life of the cosmos within cosmic history' (1989: 76).

Eventually, in Fox's thought, the resurrection becomes a cosmic psychic event and a by-product of mysticism (1988a: 31, 38, 66, 141, 161). Additionally, in *A New Reformation* (Thesis No. 63), he declares, 'Creation, Incarnation and Resurrection are continuously happening on a cosmic as well as a personal scale. So too are Life, Death and Resurrection (regeneration and reincarnation) happening on a cosmic scale as well as a personal one' (2006a: 93). Jesus is a son of God whose life, work, teaching and death culminated in the *Via Transformativa*. In the same way as creation, his birth was a cosmic event, brought about by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, while Joseph was not his father, Jesus is a prophet of the New Creation. Indeed, he is the New Creation itself born of the spirit (1983b: 300). It seems that he is a creator who has been on the same psychic plane as God from the beginning, permeated by the presence of God, but was not quite divine. We will now examine Fox's second interpretation of Jesus as a divine channel.

(ii) *Jesus the divine conduit*. Jesus Christ, in Fox's thought, now becomes the agent of the new creation full of *Eros*, which is manifested in a love of life, people, nature, guesting, hosting, providing wine, feeding the hungry (Keen, 1988: 98). He is called specifically to reveal the *Eros* of God especially to the *anawim*. Jesus was the fulfilment of the prophetic tradition, and all the signs in John's Gospel—the raising of Lazarus, healing the blind man—were demonstrations of *Eros* in people's lives, a duty Paul took up after Jesus' death (1983b: 301–303). Thus, he is the New Adam who represents the inner person and wisdom personified (Fox, 1983b: 243). As Paul writes, 'The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is—from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven' (1 Cor. 15:47–49).

In these passages, Fox does not interpret Jesus as the incarnate word of God but, since he is empty, Jesus incarnates the *Dabhar* of God.⁷ Therefore, the incarnation becomes the means for the release of the divine *Dabhar*, who is the precursor the Cosmic Christ, in the course of human activity (Keen, 1988: 23). A truly emptied person, like Jesus, was so 'vulnerable to beauty and truth, to justice and compassion that he or she becomes truly hollow and a channel for divine grace' (1983b: 172). Thus, Jesus emptied and becoming a hallowed conduit and a 'source of wisdom, a royal person, a prophet' for those who followed and while he taught that it was possible to be both human and divine, he incarnated both and the dialectical process (1983b: 172, 240–41). Therefore, Fox argues, we may also become divine because Jesus was divine.

(iii) *Our divinization as an image of God*. Chenu lamented, according to Fox, the hegemony of the Fall-redemption theology, which neglected the concept of the *imago dei* and the connection with creativity within our spiritual lives. The artist has been cut off from the Church and consequently church life has been cut off from life itself (1983b: 180–83). Jesus Christ is a creator, who has been present with the Creator from the beginning; he is *Dabhar*, the creative energy of God, the playful presence hinted at in Proverbs 8:30–31 (1983b: 122). Moreover, Fox

⁷ Chapter 3:63.

argues, in the *Via Creativa*, humanity and divinity are united in the New Adam (1983b: 241) and as fellow creators with God we need to move from ‘cosmos to cosmogenesis’ because we are agents of cosmogenesis and instigators of ‘new dimensions to the cosmos’ (Fox, 1983b: 180–83). The indwelling divine power of *Dabhar* impels the artist within however, if this creative force is denied, it is capable of becoming a ‘force for destruction’ (Fox, 1983b: 180–83).

According to Dunn, the Ebonites, who were an early Jewish sect, while they acknowledged Jesus to be an exemplary person, believed he was God’s son by adoption and only then did he acquire a divine nature (1990: 241). Keen (1988: 23) also questions whether there is a hint of an exemplary adoptionsism in Fox’s work in that, Fox asks,

Might one even say that, given the biblical teaching on the Godhead as compassionate, that Jesus is not so much compassionate because he is divine as he is divine because he is compassionate? And did he, whom Christians believe is the incarnation of compassion, the Son of the Compassionate One, not teach others that they too were to be sons and daughters of Compassion? Sons and daughters of God? And therefore divine because they are compassionate? (1999a: 34)

Fox, while endorsing Jesus the man, only hints at Jesus’ divinity in our first example. Indeed his Christology is conspicuously imprecise, if not shoddy. This is not a portrayal of divine incarnation in the traditional New Testament sense. Considering all the ideas that Fox juxtaposes, we have to conclude that his portrayal of the historical Jesus displays the divine attributes of example, sensuality, compassion and creativity and this it seems is the nearest we can get to Fox’s thought. Moreover, as Keen highlights (1988:100), while Fox is intent on insisting that we ‘let go of our projections onto God’ (1983b: 433), he blithely proceeds to project his own controversial interpretation. His depiction seems to have more in common with the concept of a *Satguru* or Perfect Master: one who teaches the perfect knowledge and love of God, and then, by example, teaches his disciples to do likewise.

Saints, devoid of ego, reflect the peace, humility and purity of a devout life. Sages, though perfectly liberated, may outwardly appear detached and ordinary. *Satgurus*, also fully enlightened, guide others on the path. Aum. (ŚLOKA 122, in Subramuniyaswami, 2003: 359)

The scholars within the Jesus Seminar, Fox argues, are trying to recover the real teachings of a historical figure and in the next section, we will examine Fox's understanding of the historical Jesus.

(c) Fox and the Quest for the Historical Jesus

Society, Fox argues, faced with an ecological disaster and having trivialized and abandoned religion has become desacralized, self-destructive and confused. Nonetheless, religion itself abetted the situation by moving away from the mystical Cosmic Christ belief in favour of Jesusolatry that was an exclusive quest by liberal theologians for the historical Jesus (1995a: 86–87). This scholarly quest, according to Fox, rediscovered the emphasis on Jesus as a prophet while, at the same time, differentiating between the 'gospel words ascribed to Jesus and those attributed to the faith community' (1995a: 86–87). The coming age will embrace the 'Cosmic Christ in tandem with Jesus the Liberator and prophet' (1995a: 86–87), he argues, and both are presented as distinct characters within Fox's thought.

The Jesus of history, Fox argues, was a sage, a revolutionary and part of the Wisdom movement in first-century Palestine. He offered an alternative way to live by aphorisms and parables. And it is these tales that put us in touch with his voice while appealing to the imagination. 'Jesus is trying to awaken us like Buddha did' (2002b: 104). Moreover, the Kingdom movement was a revolutionary technique to empower the peasants who were oppressed by the taxation of an expanding Roman empire (Crossan in Fox, 2002b: 106, cf. Crossan, 1988: 12). Meanwhile, while Gotthold Lessing's research eventually concluded that 'if no historical truth can be demonstrated then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truth...there is an ugly great ditch I cannot get

across' (Lessing and Chadwick, 1957: 31, 55).⁸ However, while seeking to introduce a cosmological dimension to this scholarship, Fox argues that the Jesus Seminar theologians in their quest for the historical Jesus have now crossed that ditch and their investigations have reached their zenith. Their findings, according to Fox, are summarized in the analysis by Dominic Crossan (1991: 421f.) who defines Jesus as a 'peasant Jewish Cynic', a 'hippy in a world of Augustan yuppies' (1997a: 153). Subsequently, in the preface of the new edition of *Original Blessing* (2000), Fox writes,

Today's biblical scholars confirm much of the Christology presented in *Original Blessing*. They also alert us to recognize the difference between the teachings of Jesus and those of Paul. They beg a development of that majority of Christian writings which pertain to the Cosmic Christ. It is when the two are balanced, the historical Jesus and the Cosmic Christ, that we have a balanced grasp of the Jesus story and the Christ story and Spirit can come alive again. (2000: 4)

It is in *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, in which he claims to summarize the Cosmic Christ tradition, that Fox differentiates between Jesus who is a 'Cosmic Christ' and the indwelling Cosmic Christ, unconstrained by history, with an archetypal mystical power that is the divine promise for every human being (1988a: 103).

In the preface to the 2000 edition of *Original Blessing*, Fox writes, '*The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* summarizes the Cosmic Christ tradition, and the recent book by Andrew Harvey, *Son of Man: The Mystical Path to Christ*...does an excellent job of balancing the historical Jesus and the Cosmic Christ' (2000: 335). The two main questions that confront scholars, Harvey argues, are: 'Who was the man Jesus and does anything connect the historical person and the Cosmic Christ?' (1999: 3). More important, is the fact that, if Jesus was the world-teacher, then the way he lived his life, and expressed himself and interacted with people are important because they are a measure of the 'Christ-force' prevalent during his lifetime (Harvey, 1999: 3).

⁸ Lessing takes this quotation from *Reimarus Fragments* (Talbert, 1970).

Current historical criticism, Harvey argues, has proved that the gospel accounts should be approached as cautiously fashioned versions of Jesus' life and compiled to attract different groups, dispositions and spiritual interest within the Early Church. The Gospels are not directly inspired, nor are they accurate historical documents. The Gospels were culled from random narratives in the last third of the first century and are condensed accounts gathered from various Christian communities. Therefore, treasured myths and firmly held beliefs in the veracity of the Gospels have to be surrendered. Jesus was born in Nazareth. He was neither the firstborn nor the only child of Joseph and Mary and he was a peasant (a '*tekton*', an artisan carpenter). Furthermore, modern scholarship offers no firm evidence that Jesus even considered himself to be the Messiah, or the Son of God. It is not Jesus' fault that the people understood him to be the 'savior and guru figure' he never sought to be (Harvey, 1999: 3–6). Thus, to summarize, Fox understands Jesus as,⁹

- weak and imperfect as he is, 'he is the power and the wisdom of God'. He shows us a way to God which is grounded in the *Via Positiva*—God's and our love of creation. A way of *Eros* (1983b: 123).
- the man Jesus who incarnated the Cosmic Christ and today we can respond to the challenge of deep ecumenism because we also may follow his example (1988a: 235).
- the teacher whose teaching was nature based and founded on the Wisdom literature and thus a precursor to the Cosmic Christ tradition of creativity (2002c).
- an archetype and source of for a new spirituality (1988a: 3, 149; cf. 1991a: 51, 52; Keen, 1988: 99).

Strange as these concepts sound they may not be unique in approach. According to Jay G Williams, the Bible was not intended to be read with an objective detachment and the task of interpreting scripture is impeded by our 'intellectual and emotional baggage', which can only be discarded by way of a 'prefrontal lobotomy' (1973: 221–22). Today theology is retreating from the 'hard positivism of the past' to a new spirituality, which

⁹ See also Keen, 1988: 99.

engages with a variety of spiritual activities, from ‘Yoga, to the reading of Tarot cards and the *I Ching* to ecstatic dancing to the glory of Jesus. We may very well expect that as these students turn to the Bible, they will also exegete in a new way, a way which may seem quite peculiar to older scholars’ (Williams, 1973: 227). Furthermore, this new spirituality, which I would argue is demonstrated in Fox’s thought, is not concerned with ‘what “really happened” or what the original sources actually were like’ (Williams, 1973: 227). The emphasis is on the ‘Bible as a literary mirror in which he can see both himself and the mysteries of the cosmos reflected’ and today it seems that ‘the question is not exegesis or eisegesis but rather what is revealed to and about the interpreter in the interpretation’ (Williams, 1973: 227). In *Original Blessing*, Fox only alluded to the ‘Cosmic Christ’ so we will now turn to *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, which Fox presents as a paradigm shift for our time that weaves the insights of numerous traditions and present us with Fox’s mystical cosmology and the numinous Cosmic Christ.

4. The Quest for the Cosmic Christ

The Coming of the Cosmic Christ seeks to unite ethics, mysticism and spiritual development within Fox’s alternative vision of creation spirituality. His use of the word ‘cosmic’ refers to the ‘cosmic meaning and significance’ of Jesus work, in a way that may be compared with the Cosmic Christian spirituality, developed in Paul’s letters to the Colossians, Ephesians and Philippians, hence, the small case ‘c’ in comparison with the title ‘Cosmic Christ’ that Fox now begins to utilize (1983b: 73–77).

While Fox has divided the book into five sections he begins with a vivid image that came to him in a dream, which he entitles ‘your mother is dying’. Subsequently, he examines how a personified ‘Compassion’ is dying throughout the world, hope, youth, native peoples, cultures, religions and wisdom are all dying he claims. The ensuing book becomes an extended vision and in a prophetic statement, Fox argues, that the ecological destruction of planet earth has been caused by humankind’s lack of a living cosmology. In section two, Fox proposes that mysticism has a cosmological dimension, which humanity needs to interact with in order to establish their place in the Universe. The ‘Quest for the Cosmic Christ’, section three, ‘surveys the mystical tradition from the

Bible to the modern-day’, whilst section four asks who the Cosmic Christ is. Finally, he calls for the resurrection of the living Cosmic Christ in our beings (1988a: 1–3).

While Fox applies his cosmic perspective to everything, he argues that all Christians must reclaim the historical Jesus as a teacher and mystic who had dipped deeply into the well of ‘experience (trust) and nondualism’ (1988a: 67). However, any pretence of a quest for the historical Jesus is abandoned as Fox’s mystical inclination leads him inexorably towards the Cosmic Christ. This cosmic vision finally becomes the ‘pattern that connects—heaven and earth, past and future, divinity and humanity, all of creation’ (1988a: 87, 133–35). It would be easier to describe what *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* ignores rather than what it addresses, as it is comparable to grappling with a hologram that proves elusive or traversing Hampton Court maze. However, ‘to refer to Christ as cosmic immediately suggests that he has a wider significance than God who becomes man in order to reveal himself to and to save human persons, “Cosmic” implies that Christ is involved in some kind of universe’ (Lyons, 1982: 1; Lyons in Jefford, 2003: 1).

Fox calls for the surrender of the personal saviour of fundamentalism, an antimystical religious vision and an anthropocentric Jesus (1988a: 81–82). The Cosmic Christ is a Jungian archetype, in Fox’s thought, and, he argues, ‘we are all in some way anointed kings, queens, priests and messiahs’ (1988a: 242). It is this revelation that encourages humanity to reverence our origins, our divinity and our responsibility as co-creators who are called to birth the as yet unborn Cosmic Christs (1988a: 137–38). Indeed, while Jung described several archetypes, he remythologized Jesus as a suffering saviour archetype that symbolized humanity’s capacity for transformation and psychic growth. Jesus’ crucifixion, in Jung’s analysis, became synonymous with the ‘death of the ego and his resurrection represents the rebirth of the unconscious-integrated ego...[while] Jesus opens his divine mystery and universal message to anyone willing to make the “journey”’ (Jung, 1965: 211; Jung in Dunbar, 2003: 6, 2–3).

The concept of archetypes, which Jung developed, is a pattern that Fox has continued.¹⁰ Jung's saviour has become the Cosmic Christ as his suffering archetype becomes the *anawim* and a suffering mother earth. The Cosmic Christ will bring about re-birth, transformation and psychic mystical healing, while sustaining us for the journey to which we are called (1988a: 17, 142–43, 242). In his search for the ancient Cosmic Christ doctrine, Fox returns to what he perceives to be the sources, the Hebrew Bible, pre-existent Wisdom in the traditions of Israel, the prophets, apocalyptic literature, Paul's New Testament hymns, the Gospels and orthodox theology (1988a), and we will examine each of these in turn.

(a) The Cosmic Christ as Pre-existent and Apocalyptic Wisdom

Fox begins by returning to what he argues is the source of the Cosmic Christ that has been hidden for centuries. Sittler, he argued, understood that 'the theological magnificence of Cosmic Christology lies for the most part, still tightly folded in the Church's innermost heart and memory' (1962: 183). In the same way that Teilhard de Chardin, who described the cosmic quality of Christ, as a third distinct nature, a cosmic attribute other than his divine and human nature, coextensive with the universe (1988a: 83). According to Fox, the Cosmic Christ was presented in the Old Testament as Cosmic Wisdom and personified in Proverbs (1:20–33; 8:1–36; 9:1–6) and Sirach (24:5–6, 9, 26) and Wisdom (7:27; 8:1). The apocryphal Cosmic Wisdom was present at creation (9:9), worthy to govern and sit on God's throne (9:13). Subsequent, to pre-existent Wisdom, Fox argues, that the Cosmic Christ became evident within the prophets and, as summarized by Heschel, what 'concerns the prophet is the human event as a divine experience' (Fox, 1988a: 87). God's interaction with humanity in all life's experiences and demonstrated in the book of Daniel and the apocalyptic traditions of Israel, which are 'steeped in angelolatry' and 'visions of cosmic happenings' (Fox, 1988a: 87).

In contrast to Fox, Alan Galloway also summarizes the apocalyptic view of the world and the cosmic redemption at the heart of the primitive gospel. The involvement of God

¹⁰ See Chapter 2.

within Semitic tribal religion was asserted from the beginning he argues, in that, the people recognized God's universal presence within the world as well as his transcendence without question. Eventually, he argues, because of prophetic teaching, the concept of God's retributive eschatological justice became clear to Israel, the surrounding nations and the environment. In addition, because Judaism rejected dualism it was forced to develop a doctrine of cosmic redemption as a solution to the problem of evil (1951: 3–8, 20). While Galloway affirms the idea of a Cosmic Christ, this is not Fox's Cosmic Christ. Galloway's thesis recognized the reality of evil and his thought remained firmly within redemptive theology and the Early Church's conviction that Christ had established his universal rule. We will now examine Fox's claims for the Cosmic Christ in the New Testament.

(b) The Cosmic Christ in the New Testament

The Cosmic Christ with the big 'C' is the cosmic power who pervades all people as mentioned in the previous section (*ii Jesus the Divine Conduit*) and who appears fully formed in *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. The life and death of Jesus the man, has no cosmic significance for Fox and the 'biblical incarnate Christ' is not the Christ of Creation spirituality. Fox's mystic Cosmic Christ dimension is merely a principle, an universal presence or a metaphor for a cosmic awakening. Fox's Christ is contained within the cosmos and, as Keen highlights, while he has retained the horizontal hold Fox has lost the vertical dimension and therefore any sense of the transcendence (1988: 102).

'Since the pain, suffering, and sin are cosmic—bigger than we can control and far more complex in space and time than we can imagine—redemption must be cosmic as well' and as the 'Cosmic Christ wrestled within Jesus...to make him a cosmic warrior' in the same manner he will enable humanity to respond to cosmic evil. Where humanity goes in answer to human need and suffering the Cosmic Christ accompanies them and where injustice prevails the Cosmic Christ is crucified again (Fox, 1988a: 152–53). 'One might speak, then, of the already born Cosmic Christ (realized eschatology) who we see only in a "mirror and darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12) and of the yet unborn Christ of justice, creativity

and compassion in self and society' (1988a: 136), a mystical archetypal power that has much in common with planetary Buddhism (1997a: 152–53).

Christ for Paul is the one who arose from the dead and, Fox argues, in Paul's thought it is Christ's relationship to the universe that is prominent, not Christ's relationship to the Church. The hymn in Philippians (2:6–11) is one of incarnation and exaltation to the Lord of the Universe—the Cosmic Christ. Furthermore, the hymn in Colossians (1:15–20), Fox argues, is a 'vast Christic vision' (1988a: 90) of Christ's pre-existence as the first-born of all creation in similar manner to Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22. Thus, Jesus is 'human and time bound as well as preexisting and transcending' (1988a: 90) but, as this, in Fox's opinion, is an ancient hymn to the Cosmic Christ, the Jesus here is the man who is manifesting cosmic qualities (1988a: 90).

As we have seen in Chapter 3, Fox identifies *Dabhar* (word) with the creative energy of God manifested in exploits and deeds, not just words and, our task, he argues, is to be filled and energized with it. Then Christians will declare that 'primeval wisdom, the word-before-words, the creative energy of God has become one of us', as we saw in Chapter 3, Christ as the *Dabhar* is indistinguishable from Wisdom as the *Dabhar* in Fox's thought (1983b: 40).¹¹ Therefore, Fox understands *Dabhar* (Wisdom) to be with God prior to creation. Moreover, in a parody of John 1:1 and with the words 'in the beginning was the *Dabhar*', Fox introduces Jesus as a 'creator' who was present with the 'Creator' from the beginning as the playful presence described in Proverbs 8: 30–31 (1983b: 122–23):

I was by his side, a master craftsman,
delighting him day after day,
ever at play in his presence,
at play everywhere in his world,
to be with the sons of man.

He takes this parody further in *Creation Spirituality* in a sacred epic:

¹¹ Chapter 3, §6 (a), '*Dabhar*: The Creative Energy of God the Verb'.

In the beginning was the gift.
And the gift was with God and the gift was God.
And the gift came and set its tent among us,
first in the form of a fireball
that burned unabated for 750,000 years
and cooked in its immensely hot oven
hadrons and lepton.
These gifts found a modicum of stability,
enough to give birth to the first atomic creatures,
hydrogen and helium.
A billion years of stewing and stirring
and the gifts of hydrogen and helium. (1991a: 1)

Furthermore, Fox argues, Jesus' status as personified wisdom is further substantiated by his statement 'I am the vine, ye are the branches' in John 15:5, which reiterates Wisdom's claim that 'I bud forth delights like the vine, my blossoms become fruit fair and rich' in Sirach 24:17–21 (Fox, 1983b: 122). Wisdom observes 'I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old' (Ps. 78:2), and Jesus told the crowds 'I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world' (Matt. 13:35). He heard wisdom, grew in wisdom, spoke wisdom, and played the role of wisdom and paid the ultimate price Fox argues (1983b: 122). Even so,

This 'son of Adam, son of God' (Luke 3:38) fully incarnates the *Dabhar*, the ever-flowing, cosmos-filling, creative energy of the Creator. Yet he becomes fully flesh as we are, pitching a tent in our midst. Thus God is not incarnated as the Perfect One but, since Jesus is 'alike us in every way save sin', as the imperfect one. The divinely imperfect one, or if you will the Imperfect Divinity. (Fox. 1983b: 123)

Thus, for Fox, the release of the 'divine *Dabhar* through human creativity is the primary focus of the incarnation and not a wiping away of human sin'. Therefore, the Jesus who

comes as the ‘power and wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 1:25) in Theme 20, in Fox’s thought, is not the pre-existent Christ, who became incarnate. It is the historical Jesus empowered by the Cosmic Christ (1983b: 123, 241–43).

Christ’s cosmic work pervades the New Testament, Galloway argues, in that he ‘restored all evil to a place within the intrinsic meaning of the world’ (Galloway, 1951: 55–56). If the historical Jesus is indeed the Christ then ‘he is a figure of cosmic significance’, an all-encompassing saviour who came to individuals, the universe and the whole of creation (Galloway, 1951: 55–56). However, for Fox, the highest communion with the divine is manifested in cosmic wisdom and the experience of *Dabhar* (word) in all the blessing and the sufferings of life (Fox, 1983b: 37–38).

(c) The Cosmic Christ in the Church Fathers

In his search for further evidence of the Cosmic Christ, Fox suggests that the concept only pervaded the theology of the Greek Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries in a natural progression from the Early Church. His main source of information appears to be Pelikan’s book, *Jesus through the Centuries* and the main contenders, from among the Church Fathers and quoted in Fox, are Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus and Athanasius. Allan Galloway argues that, at first, primitive Jewish eschatology thought of God only in reference to the Jewish people. Eventually, because of prophetic teaching, the concept of God’s ‘retributive eschatological justice’ became clear to Israel, the surrounding nations and the environment. In addition, because Judaism ‘rejected any dualism’ it was forced to develop a doctrine of cosmic redemption as a solution to the problem of evil. Thus, Christ’s cosmic work ‘in one form or another pervades the New Testament’ in that he ‘restored all evil to a place within the intrinsic meaning of the world’ (1951: 3–8, 20, 55–56).

Nonetheless, while patristic theology was systematic, according to Galloway, it did not do justice to what had been implicit in the New Testament. Due to the perceived errors with Origen’s philosophy, the conservative anti-Gnostic Fathers in the West did not pursue a ‘true re-interpretation of cosmic eschatology’ (1951: 101). While Irenaeus

showed some interest, he did not develop a definite doctrine and, having corrected the Gnostic dualism, added nothing to what Paul had already developed. Galloway argues that medieval theology managed to circumnavigate the fundamental problems that arose from the concept of cosmic redemption. However, the Renaissance period changed everything and was foundational to the problems with which the Church is struggling (Galloway, 1951: 99–104, 121, 131). Russell Jefford, in his thesis, ‘The Patristic Concept of the Cosmic Christ’, which surveyed the work of Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus and the Cappadocians (particularly Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa) argued that ‘none of these authors would have recognised themselves as possessing a particularly “cosmic” understanding of Christ. Instead, they merely sought to work out and explain their understanding of the person and work of Christ’ (2003). Fox, however, is ignorant of such research.

He offers little research of his own, other than to call attention to the fact that the Church Fathers in the West had neglected the theology of the Eastern Church, which was ‘immersed’ in cosmology, the deification of humanity and by inference the Cosmic Christ. Nonetheless, Orthodoxy’s ‘platonic dualism’ often failed to equip them with a love of earth and earthiness on which a theology of the Cosmic Christ must be grounded (1988a: 107–109). Therefore, we will turn our attention to Fox’s interpretation of Wisdom (Lady *Sophia*) prior to examining the Orthodox Church and the doctrine of Sophiology.

5. *The Metamorphosis of Wisdom to Sophia*

Quoting Clement of Alexandria, Fox argues that the ‘*Logos* of God has become human so that you might learn from a human being how a human being may become divine’ (1988a: 75). The second person of the Trinity, ‘The *Logos* of Liberation’ (or the Word, Jesus the prophet who became a Cosmic Christ) called, in his celebration of the *Via Creativiva*, for a return to original blessing (1991a: 57–58). Subsequently, having made

wisdom¹² the third person within his ‘Cosmological Trinity’, Fox inevitably begins to speak of Wisdom as the Spirit of *Sophia*—a holy spirit (1991a: 62).

It is generally accepted, according to Fox, that the cosmic title *Sophia* was replaced by the title *Logos* in John’s prologue as a cover for the gender issue of identifying Jesus with the female *Sophia* (1991a: 58, n.). However, Fox argues that the whole of John’s Gospel has been affected, in that, the original title *Sophia* has been substituted by the name Jesus. Paul, Fox argues, speaks of Christ as *Sophia* (1 Cor. 2:7, 15:23, 26, 51; Rom. 16:25; 1991a: 58, n.). Nonetheless, these references do not mention *Sophia* even in the *Catholic Jerusalem Bible*. It is impossible to substantiate Fox’s argument since Paul in 1 Cor. 2:7 talks of the ‘mysterious wisdom of God’ while 1 Cor. 15:23 addresses the issue of Christ as the first-fruit and discussed the end times, while Rom. 16:25 states ‘and now to him who can make you strong’ (New Jerusalem Bible, Catholics Online, 2010: n.p.).

The Western Church emphasized the outpouring of the spirit from the ‘interaction of creator and child’ while the Eastern Church, Fox argues, taught that all began with Wisdom. Fox begins to embody *Sophia* as a ‘woman who undergirds and “permeates” all things’ in a similar way to his understanding of the Cosmic Christ and Wisdom personified (1991a: 64). To examine the various interpretations of Wisdom-*Sophia* within Western and Eastern orthodoxy would be impossible within the remit of this thesis. Nonetheless, some comments will be helpful because it could be argued that there is a connection between Fox’s thought and orthodox thinking, despite the critique that will follow. Having said that, if we itemize the qualities we have already established in connection to the Cosmic Christ and Wisdom, the correlation to *Sophia* in Fox’s thought will become obvious:

- A significant number of Paul’s Letters have Cosmic Christ motifs and references to Christ as wisdom or wisdom in Christ’s life (1983b: 307).
- Cosmic Wisdom was present at creation as the creative energy of God (1983b: 40).

¹² See Chapter 3, §2, ‘Augustine Abandoned’.

- Cosmic Christ is connected with creation as pre-existent and apocalyptic Wisdom (1988a; 87).
- Cosmic Christ and wisdom indwells all beings (1983b: 6).
- Humanity is born with original Wisdom (1983b: 6).
- Cosmic Christ brings transformation and healing (1988a, 17).
- Cosmic wisdom is in communion with the divine
- Cosmic Christ and Wisdom are connected to the Mystical tradition (1983b: 6).
- Creation tradition is Feminist Wisdom (1983b: 18).

(a) Sophia Wisdom in Fox's Spirituality

This leap into Sophiology appears in *Creation Spirituality* where Fox claims that a number of scholars are rediscovering *Sophia* as central to the creative principle (1991a: 58, 62). Indeed, his primary claim is that Wisdom, whom he designated as the third person of the trinity, now corresponds to the Spirit of *Sophia*. She is the third person of the Trinity the Holy Spirit (1991a: 62). Consequently, Wisdom and *Sophia* are indivisible and share the same qualities. What applies to one applies to the other. *Sophia* is the 'fecund spirit, the spirit of generativity, the spirit who broods over the fetal waters of birth, of transformation, of Pentecost' (1991a: 62). *Sophia* is a co-creator, universal, a cosmic spirit of creative imaginative truth, a feminine connective unifying influence and a nurturing fertile 'ecological greening power' who births new 'forms and social structures' (1991a: 62–63). *Sophia* dancing in the cosmos is at the heart of authentic feminism a spirit of 'eros and of pathos' crying out for justice and liberation (1991a: 63). She is *Sophia*/Wisdom indivisible from the mystical cosmological tradition. She is 'the matrix' for the interconnected cosmic trinity of 'Cosmology, Liberation and Wisdom' who cannot function until *Sophia* returns for she is 'Creator and Prophet' (1991a: 64). We will now briefly examine orthodox theology's understanding of *Sophia*.

(b) Sophia Wisdom within Traditional Russian Orthodoxy Theology

The point of this discussion is that arguably, both Sophiology and Fox imply that God created through 'wisdom' and, however one wants to classify their thoughts, the issue is

not one of terminology but the implied inference that there appears to be more than personification, or energy in view.

According to Vladimir Lossky (1991: 86), Georges Florovsky (1976: 67–68) and John Meyendorff (Palamas, 1983: 93ff.), the affirmation that a transcendent God who is radically immanent to creation is foundational to the essence/energies distinction within Orthodox theology, an understanding that may be traced to Gregory Palamas. As Lossky argues, orthodox theology ‘distinguishes in God three hypostases, the nature or essence and the energies. The Son and the Holy Spirit are...personal processions the energies natural processions’ and all are inseparable (1991: 85–86). The energies, on the other hand, are the outward flow of the divine life and the exterior manifestation of the Trinity. Thus, *Sophia*/Wisdom in traditional orthodox thought is understood as a divine energy, an exterior manifestation of God’s Wisdom (1991: 72, 80). The development of what was known as Sophiology was a synthesis of Orthodox theology and modern thought, which dominated Russian Orthodox religious philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In order to appreciate what Fox is attributing to *Sophia*/wisdom we will examine the issue of Sophiology next.

(c) The Issue of Sophiology

Celia Deane-Drummond in her analysis of *Sophia* highlights the importance of both Gregory of Nyssa’s mystical apophatic theology and Maximus the Confessor’s cosmological Christology, which emphasized the Wisdom of God within the early Eastern tradition (2000: 75–78). Russian theological reflection on universal wisdom came to the fore and was developed through the work of three men, Vladimir Soloviev (or Solovyov), Pavel Florensky and Sergei Bulgakov. However, Bulgakov, was the only one to develop a comprehensive theology (Williams, 1997: 502–503; Deane-Drummond, 2000: 79–84). Soloviev developed a new vision that emphasized a ‘universal perspective...a quasi-mythological cosmology centred on the figure of *Sophia*, she is the divine wisdom, the Eternal Feminine...incarnate in the Virgin Mary’ (Williams, 1997: 500–10). Soloviev writes in the foreword to Bulgakov’s book:

Let it be known: today the Eternal Feminine

In an incorruptible body is descending to Earth.
In the unfading light of the new goddess
Heaven has become one with the deeps. (Bulgakov,
1993: vii)

Florensky eventually developed Solovyov's theology further, hypothesizing that 'all created realities are expressions of the Wisdom of God. Hence wisdom is the "fruit of a living religious consciousness" divine love and action, rather than the invention of philosophical speculation' (Deane-Drummond, 2000: 83; Williams in Ford, 1997: 503).

Meanwhile, drawing on the work of Gregory Palamas and Maximus the Confessor, Bulgakov argued that God created through wisdom. While his theology is mystical and panentheistic *Sophia*, the Divine Wisdom, became an unifying principle that led to the development of the doctrine now categorized as 'Sophiology'. *Sophia* develops and becomes a 'living being with a personal hypostatic dimension' while not sharing 'in the divine life of the Trinity'. Bulgakov does not understand *Sophia* as created. She is the 'image of God...the intermediary between God and Creation' (Deane-Drummond, 2000: 84–87).

Rowan Williams also argues that Bulgakov understood *Sophia* as 'the divine nature, God's own life considered under the aspect of God's freedom to live the divine life in what is not God'. The Church, he argued, while remaining societal is also consubstantial 'it is "*Sophia* in the process of becoming"' (1997: 503). Williams describes Bulgakov's original theology as panentheistic and 'appallingly obscure' and, while his central theme is *kenosis*, an aspect of creation, the incarnation, redemption and the inner life of the Trinity, he failed to develop it. While fascinated with feminist images of the Godhead, Bulgakov's main Christological concern was to show how Christ is the place, where uncreated and created *Sophia* is united (1997: 503–504).

Soloviev with his universal perspective understood "*Sophia*" as fragmented in the empirical universe, but still at one in God'. Nonetheless, Williams argued, future Russian metaphysics were merely a 'series of footnotes to Soloviev' (1975: 209; 1997: 501). Eventually, his followers, while attempting to develop his Sophiology, were faced

with the task of removing the ‘elements of pantheism and determinism’ that had crept into his work (1997: 501). Meanwhile, Bulgakov ‘rejected a matter/spirit dualism. However, the nature/hypostasis dualism with which he worked’ caused problems and eventually, Bulgakov, between 1917 and 1925, had to clarify,

the point that *Sophia* is not a ‘hypostasis’ (correcting both Florensky and his own earlier work) [sic], and to purge out any residual pantheism: divine *Sophia* is not an objectified World—Soul, but the impulse in things toward harmony and order, toward complex unity of organisation. Bulgakov speaks of this impulse as the world’s ‘*eros*’ and such language should remind us that Bulgakov’s sophiology is far more a sustained metaphor than a theory. (Williams, 1997: 503)

Within Orthodoxy, the icon of the *Pantocrator*, the Christ is the personification and ‘expositor of divine Wisdom’ whiles the icon of St Sophia or Holy Wisdom at Novgorod may have influenced Vladimir Soloviev in his deliberations on Sophiology (Baggley, 2000: 133; Nes, 2005: 46). As Brenda Meehan suggests, many Western feminist theologians have—‘independently of and for the most part ignorant of Russian Sophiology’—turned to the image of *Sophia* in order to reclaim feminist images of God while counteracting patriarchy, an analysis that would also include Fox (1996: 149). Nonetheless, the symbolism in the Icons of the Divine Sophia are ‘far from standardized, and decidedly ambiguous and Florovsky argues that “it is certain that in Byzantine art we never had any canonized scheme for the representation of Divine Wisdom”...and the images of Wisdom remain the most abstract of all holy pictures’ (Florovsky, 1975: 135; Kornblatt, 2007: 128).

The Divine Sophia never existed as a real being.... The personified figure is sometimes associated with Christ or with Mary, or depicted as an androgynous angel...[or] with images of other figures and events, including the Transfiguration...partly because of common eucharistic symbolism. The situation becomes increasingly complex as western

images of Mary are more and more conflated...with the traditional Orthodox symbolism of Christ-Wisdom. (Kornblatt, 2007: 129)

Vladimir Lossky, critiquing Sophiology, argues that there is no ‘tension between theology and philosophy’, but when apophaticism is abandoned, as in Origen, theology is denuded and we are left with a religious philosophy and the ‘unknowable God’ of Orthodoxy becomes the ‘impersonal God of philosophy’ (1991: 42, 79–82). Within orthodox theology, Lossky argues, the Trinity is understood as a hypostatic union according to God’s essences. However, the union between God and man involves neither essence nor hypostasis, but energies. These energies may be understood as the ‘exterior manifestation of the Trinity’, glimpses of God’s attributes—‘Wisdom, Life, Power, Justice, Love and Being—divine manifestations’, which cannot be internalized within the hypostatic union (1991: 42, 80), as with Fox this was Bulgakov’s fundamental error, in that he identified the ‘energy of wisdom (*Sophia*)’, with the essence of God (1991: 79–82). As Gregory of Nazianzen articulated:

No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by
the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them
than I am carried back to the One.

When I think of any One of the Three I think of Him as the
Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what
I am thinking of escapes me.

I cannot grasp the greatness of That One so as to attribute
a greater greatness to the Rest.

When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot
divide or measure out the Undivided Light. (2009: xli; Lossky, 1991:
46)

The energy ‘originates in the Father who creates all things by the Son in the Holy Spirit’ and subsequently the Son acts as the ‘power of the Father...from Him and in Him according to His own hypostasis’ (1991: 82–83). As Lossky explains:

If the Godhead is manifested in the energies, the Father appears as the possessor of the [attribute of wisdom] energy which is manifested, the son as the manifestation of the Father, the Holy Spirit as he who manifests. That is why the attribute of Wisdom, common to the Trinity, designates the Son in the order of the divine economy; thus: the Son is the hypostatic Wisdom of the Father. (1991: 82–83)

John Meyendorff argues that the doctrine of creation has become prominent within Eastern orthodoxy twice. Firstly, in connection with Origen's theology, who endeavoured to find a 'synthesis between the scriptural account of creation and the metaphysical presuppositions of Platonism' (1983: n.p.). The second occasion involved the Russian sophiologists, who were searching for 'ways of integrating Christian thought in the framework of contemporary philosophical methodology' (1983: n.p.). Hence, God was understood as the 'creative source of a "unitotallity" which ontologically united God with creation...and used *Sophia* or Wisdom as its model' (1983: n.p.). The doctrine of creation was central to their quest and pivotal to the subsequent critique of Sophiology (1983: n.p.). Likewise, Zenkovsky argues that common to Sophiology were the themes of:

- (a) a natural philosophy, a conception of the world as a 'living whole'—what is now called a 'biocentric' conception of the world—with the related problem of the 'world-soul' and the timeless, ideal 'basis' of the world;
- (b) the theme of anthropology, which relates man and the mystery of the human spirit to nature and the Absolute; and finally
- (c) the theme of the 'divine' aspect of the world, which relates the ideal sphere in the world to what is 'beyond being'. (2003: 841)

Variations of these themes echo throughout Fox's philosophy. Soloviev prophesied that *Sophia* would 'return among humanity', while Fox argues that the interconnected cosmic trinity of 'Cosmology, Liberation and Wisdom' cannot function until Wisdom—*Sophia* returns. This resurrection of the feminine, or the 'Assumption' and return of 'the

Goddess' is necessary for our salvation, he argues (1991a: 64). Florensky, argued for the vindication and acceptance of *Sophia* into the Trinity' while Bulgakov's speculations regarding the 'nature of *Sophia* and the Trinity suggested a somewhat closer relationship than Orthodox theologians could tolerate' (Matthews, 2001: 106, 302). Jesus, Fox argues, is a 'unique incarnation of God in history both as *Logos* (the Word) and as Wisdom' and, in support of this thesis, he argues that biblical scholars are beginning to identifying the *Sophia* tradition within the New Testament, a tradition that was subsumed, by the *Logos* texts because of early Gnostic movements in the Church (1991a: 58, n.).

Fox's Christology is obviously not totally based on Sophiology, but it contains in common certain key elements. Indeed, whichever of his definitions one selects, it could be argued that he has granted the Cosmic Christ-Wisdom-*Sophia-Dabhar-Logos-Word*, because they are interchangeable, a wider role than just being an attribute or energy of God. Sophiology, of course, eventually denied *Sophia* any hypostatic status within the Trinity. However, we have seen that Fox appears to understand the Cosmic Christ in terms of *Sophia* conceived as a hypostasis, in that 'the Trinity is at work—the creator with Cosmic Christ and Spirit together. Because Fox does not differentiate, or is unclear in his argument, we have to assume that what applies to one applies to all (1991a: 115–16). As Matthews also argues, while the Goddess has been expunged from traditional theology, *Sophia* is being insinuated in her place and, whether Fox calls her Wisdom or *Sophia*, he calls for her return to central stage (2001: 106, 302). Nonetheless, frustratingly, one is left wondering whether Fox is being deliberately ambiguous in order to allow a breadth of interpretation and open-endedness to his theology. We will finish by drawing together Fox's understanding of Jesus while briefly commenting on similar trends within Catholic Theology.

6. Conclusion

While Fox recognizes that the Jesus of history was both divine and human, he denies Jesus' objective divinity.

The Cosmic Christ (wisdom incarnate)...becomes the immortal who has voluntarily taken it upon himself, in the person of Jesus, to join the human species in our dilemma: [that is] having the Divine power of creativity, being made in the image and likeness of God, but not being able to exercise it without guilt or fear. This then is salvation or redemption: liberation to be creative, liberty to exercise our God-given and Divine gifts of creativity. (2002b: 94)

Fox's hypothesis, forces us to conclude it is the Cosmic Christ who indwelt the historical Jesus. Moreover, Fox understands Jesus' divinity, while perfected, as an extension of his personality, a character trait. 'Jesus is not so much compassionate because he is divine as he is divine because he is compassionate. And did he...not teach others that they too were...divine because they are compassionate?' (1999a: 34). Thus, the man Jesus manifested attributes that we associate with God: beauty, compassion and creativity and to 'birth wisdom or to birth compassion is to birth God.' We, who follow his example, as co-creators, also have a significant role in the birthing of God within the cosmos (1983b: 241, 225).

Jesus, Fox argues, is the divine conduit and the sublime example that historically Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Dorothy Day, followed. They, in turn, released the 'divine *Dabhar* through human creativity' and became channels and 'instruments in the new creation, agents of justice and transformation in, a salvific history of renewal and rebirth' (1983b: 123, 172, 243, 303). The point is that the Cosmic Christ shows humans and the creation how to live in a Godlike manner (1988a: 231). Interestingly, Albert Einstein argued that

The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description... If there is any religion that

could cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.
(Einstein in Murray, 1982: 29)

While we have discussed the Cosmic Christ as the ‘pattern that connects’, there is a sense in which, according to Fox, he is not born yet. The historical Jesus did not fully display his cosmic potential and even today’s believers have not brought forth the full birth. This eschatology can only be fully realized in the revealing of the Christ of ‘justice of creativity, of compassion in self and society in us.’ Although it is not always easy to grasp the details of his argument, largely because he often lacks precision however, it seems that humanity, as an incarnation of the Cosmic Christ, will radiate the divine presence.

Theologically, the cosmological eschatology that he is arguing for is realized via a cyclical creation that negates the need for a second coming (1988a: 136–39, 154).

Fox’s convoluted and imprecise thinking can be confusing. Concerning pre-existence, for example, it is not clear whether he means a pre-existent hypostasis of Christ, a pre-existent hypostasis of Wisdom, or one or the other as pre-existent attributes of God. While he recognizes the Cosmic Christ as the Creative Spirit of the Universe, he acknowledges that, by the time of the New Testament canon, this ‘being’ had become the ‘*Logos* or Word’ that indwells the Jesus of history. Therefore, we seem to have six titles that are interchangeable: Christ, *Dabhar*, Wisdom, *Sophia*, *Logos* and Word. Fox’s Christology is, at times, ambiguous but clearly, the traditional understanding of the incarnate Christ and his objective divinity has been disposed of, and while Fox’s historical Jesus was an example and a teacher, the Cosmic Christ is a nebulous vague concept.

Fox prays ‘Mother *Sophia*, Mother Wisdom come to us! Come through us! Break through us, open our eyes. Set your tent among us’ (1991a: 63). This is a reference to John 1:14–18 where the word ‘dwelt’ also means ‘set up a tent’ in Greek. However, this exchange of *Logos* with *Sophia* is little more than arbitrary in that there is no theological justification for it. Indeed, we are simply left to assume that in some way *Sophia* is no longer an attribute, but a hypostasis (1991a: 56–63).

This is important because, as Meikle argues, ‘Fox’s understanding of who Christ is, permeates his understanding of soteriology,’ which involves the removal of the layers that conceal I-am-ness (1985: 32–33). Fox describes it in the *Via Negativa* as letting go, which was epitomized in Jesus when he ‘confronted death and let go of His fear of death’ as a precursor to his entry through the *Via Positiva* into the light (1985: 32–33). Hence the ‘cross and the resurrection have only symbolic significance to us. They speak to us of our need to do the same. Letting go is salvific’ (1985: 32–33). Fox writes:

Instead of translating the word ‘metanoia’ as ‘Repent!’, as so many fall/redemption translators have done, we need to understand that its fuller meaning is letting go, a change of heart and of vision in order to envision more fully, a letting go of parochial world views in order to experience the kingdom/queendom of God. (1983b: 171)

But, as Meikle pondered bemusedly, on this pseudo-intellectual nonsense, it ‘begs the question of what is to be let go of’ (1985: 32–33).

Fox condemned those who, because of Enlightenment challenges, were involved in the ‘quest’ for the historical Jesus since they have abandoned the Cosmic Christ. However, incongruously, Fox’s Jesus bears comparison to the Jesus hypothesized by the various ‘quests’ because, he, like them, has dispensed with Jesus’ divinity (1988a: 78). Indeed, due to this similarity, Keen is convinced that Fox is firmly within the ‘liberal theological stable’ (1988: 98–99). On the contrary, in a similar way to Sophiology, Fox is mystical and panentheistic but, unlike orthodoxy’s use of God’s essences and energies, he fails to make a clear distinction, and falls into the trap that Lossky highlighted. Hence, we are left with a nebulous Trinity and an unclear religious philosophy.

Nonetheless, it could also be argued that he retains vestiges of his Roman Catholic instruction and Fox’s original ideas have been replicated within Catholic theology. Following a similar line of reasoning to Fox, Dermot Lane argues that we have lost sight of the Cosmic Christ owing to the philosophical influence that emerged out of the Enlightenment. Hence, ‘discussions about the cosmic Christ have not been to the fore in the Christological renaissance of the last thirty years, or indeed in the Christology of the

previous two to three hundred years' (Lane, 1999: 220; cf. Pelikan, 1999: 182). Moreover, the dualism and the shift from the 'geocentric universe to a heliocentric universe of Copernicus and the move from Newtonian mechanism to Einstein's theory of relativity and quantum physics' did nothing to facilitate a dialogue between Christology and cosmology (Fox, 1988a: 78; Lane, 1999: 212–13, 220–22).

Vatican II, which transformed Roman Catholicism, eclipsed God's immanence in that it focused mainly on the anthropological consequences of the incarnation. These ideas, of course, were articulated in *Gaudium et Spes* (Paul VI, 1965):

The human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one. In consequence there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as numerous as can be, calling for efforts of analysis and synthesis...for the deposit of Faith or the truths are one thing and the manner in which they are enunciated, in the same meaning and understanding, is another. (1965: Intro, Chap. II, sec. 3)

Today, Lane argues that a new quest for the Cosmic Christ that has been missing from modern theology has begun. This is especially true in academic scholarship concerned with 'creation-centred theologies' (sic) or the 'dialogue between religion and science' and 'cosmology' (Lane, 1999: 221). However, having pointed the reader to other sources that support his thesis, it is interesting to note that Fox is overlooked—it seems that he has been ignored completely by catholic scholarship (Lane, 1999: 220–22).

Even though each section of this 'all-embracing myth' remains interdependent on the rest, there is no 'logical progression' or argument in Fox's hypothesis. Osborn, while he recognizes Fox's paradigm shift from the 'Historical Jesus to the Cosmic Christ,' argues that this new myth is 'another good example of Fox working hard to redefine traditional Christian terminology' (1994). Margaret Brearley argues that this myth conveys Fox's current understanding of contemporary society or reality. He subsequently formulates a new reality and ethics that are based wholly on this his central myth (1992: 39). As Thomas Stearns Eliot observes:

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow
(2005: 213)

There are, we have seen, plenty of shadows in Fox's Christology. As Dunbar points out,

any attempt to authenticate Jesus' teachings and historicity is destined to be a matter of personal perspective. Ancient or contemporary, fundamental or liberal, mystical or scientific, emotional or 'factual,' every depiction of Jesus reveals convictions of some kind—including mine. I realize that the notion of a global, cosmic and universal Christ—to which I subscribe—is a modern and contemporary invention. (2003: 2–3)

Throughout his books, Fox points his readers toward his quest for social justice and *Sophia* becomes one of the doors he walks through. *Sophia* is everywhere concealed in 'nature, or else hidden in the symbols and images that speak to the heart' and described as the 'dark Mother of Earth and the bright Virgin of Heaven...Black Sophia and...Sophia of the Stars' (Matthews, 1991: 19, 61). *Sophia*, the lost Goddess of Wisdom, is the key to Chapter 5, in which we will examine Fox's interaction with eco-feminism and global justice and as Alan Dregson argues, 'just as the aim of traditional philosophy is Sophia or wisdom, so the aim of ecophilosophy is ecosophy or ecological wisdom' (1997: 110–11).

Chapter 5

Continued Incarnation, Cosmic Incarnation and Global Justice

1. Introduction

This chapter will first of all examine, briefly, the allegation of Christianity's guilt, made by Lynn White relative to what he perceived to be the wilful exploitation of nature for human ends and Matthew Fox's theological analysis of the underlying issues. It will be followed by an analysis of Chenu's exploitation understanding of continued incarnation and Matthew Fox's understanding of what may be described as a cosmic incarnation, and how this is related to the Church, social justice and the joy of work. Finally, we will turn our attention to Fox's understanding of *Gaia*, the goddess and ecotheology.

According to Fox, we are all interconnected, the planet's ecological degradation making underlying isolationism impossible and our interdependence has become a necessity. Meanwhile, the twenty-first century continues to be preoccupied with underlying the increasingly politically contentious environmental problem. Unsurprisingly, in Fox's opinion, the ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis, in that the original holistic interconnection between humanity the earth and the rest of creation has been broken. This, he argues, is a crisis that can only be addressed by means of an ecumenical and panentheistic Creation spirituality, in conjunction with an interpretation of the current scientific cosmology (including a revitalized theology of social justice and deep ecumenism). Taking into consideration the intimate connection between Creator and creation, Fox argues that the current environmental crisis calls for the deconstruction and reconstruction of religious and theological scholarship. Since Lynn White proposed that the Scriptures encourage humanity to have dominion over nature, a number of theologians, including Fox, have begun to articulate an environmental biblical ethic and it is to this we will now turn.

2. The Imputation of Christianity as the Source of Our Environmental Crises

White's publication of 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', which argued that the roots of the looming ecological crisis lay in a malign anthropocentric interpretation that stemmed from the Judeo-Christian tradition, coincided with Fox's ordination in 1967 (1967: 1203–1207). Fox began to engage with the environmental and social justice debate in 1978, with a paper addressed to a protestant audience. The Church, he argued, needed a change in direction in order to emphasize a more creative form of compassion rather than a form of 'spiritualized spirituality'. A new way of 'life and a wisdom wherein we might live shared visions of a "we" rather than a "me" consciousness' within society and eco-ethics (1978a: 736). The Church's distorted anthropology with its tendency to affirm the priority of the personal over being, he argued, led to the exploitation of the earth while at the same time it de-divinized and de-sacralized creation (1984a: 114). 'What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man–nature relationship', White argued, 'we need a new religion or at least we need to rethink the old one' (1967: 1203–1207).¹

The publication of White's thesis galvanized the theological community and, in the same way that Fox turned to Hildegard, who has become an ecological warrior in his thought, 'Evangelicals, Orthodox, Catholics and liberals...revisited their traditions in search of ecological guidance and green "saints", from the Celts to St. Francis', who were all trotted out in turn in order to establish authentic environmental credentials (Keen, 1999: 1–4). As Jenkins argues, White's hypothesis continues to be relevant and, while his methodology and conclusions have been debated, scrutinized and critiqued, his work is recognized as a watershed in the eco-religious debate and it continues to influence environmental ethics and religious cosmology (2009: 283–309; cf. Bauckham, 2002: 129, n. 2).²

¹ For a brief history of environmentalist's prejudice against religion, see Oelschlaeger, 1996: 22–27.

² 'White...contributed little more to the debate, [but] he is "the most cited author in the field of the eco-theological discussion," according to H. Baranzke and H. Latnberty-Zielinski' (see Bauckham, 2002: 129).

It would appear that the perceived problem arose from a specific interpretation of Genesis 1:28–29, in that, the word ‘dominion’ was given a particularly negative interpretation, which tended to encourage an exploitative attitude to the earth’s resources even though God entrusted humankind, who were created in ‘in our image and according to our likeness’, with responsibility for the sustenance and care of the earth. Indeed, while Drane questions White’s understanding of scripture and history, he freely acknowledges that there is an element of truth in White’s hypothesis (1993: 7–11). The situation was further compounded by a reaction against what was understood as a Protestant work ethic, which fostered a capitalistic wealth-creating undercurrent that eventually, under the guise of colonialism, subjugated one people over another (Fox, 1978a: 737; Webber, 1959: i, 35; Gillen and Ghosh, 2007: 45–66).

This catastrophe, Fox argues, was further exacerbated by a traditional and fundamentalist interpretation of theology that usurped the Trinity with a single Person that he terms ‘Jesusolatry’ (2004c: n.p.) in a heresy that has supplanted ‘God the Creator and God the Spirit, to the extreme situation of God the Redeemer’ (2004c: n.p.). This, in due course, has also influenced the environmental debate though, taking into consideration the intimate relationship between Creator and creation it is surprising that the Church, Fox argues, has effectively, neglected or ignored the environment debate. Exploring the reasons for this neglect, Fox argues, may help us not only to ‘unleash religion’s pent-up power for action *vis-à-vis* the environment but also to renew religion itself. It would be a happy irony indeed if the ecological crisis were the stepping-stone to a spiritual and religious renaissance’ (2004c: n.p.).

In support of both White and Fox, Richard Bauckham agrees that a malign dominant interpretation and attitude permeated Western thinking especially in the realms of the modern scientific and technological ventures. However, Bauckham argues, White, while neglecting the elements that qualify the statements he makes, was in fact only critiquing a deviation of Christianity. Moreover, White proposes that Francis of Assisi would be an excellent role model as a patron Saint of Ecology while recommending the Eastern Orthodox tradition as a more environment-friendly model for a creation revering theology (2002: 129, 130–32, 148–49; Oelschlaeger, 1996: 22–27).

Understandably, many of those involved in the environment debate regarded the concept that humanity was to subdue the earth and have pre-eminence over the animals and creation, as anathema. This was particularly the case by all who advocated deep ecology, and many would agree with Fox's assertion that it was the rape of the earth for humankind's benefit (1995b: 7; cf. 1999a: 181; cf. Madl, 2002; Huggett and Compton, 1999: 1). Therefore, despite many attempts to refute White's simplistic but provocative thesis, some environmental activists continue to focus on the notion of dominion within the Bible. Nonetheless, however compelling the argument, others have argued that Judeo-Christianity tradition cannot be abstracted from history or other cultures. Ecological exploitation is not unique to Christianity and actually, the whole debacle could equally be attributed to the Renaissance, the Enlightenment or the Industrial Revolution (Osborn, 1993: 30; Bouma-Prediger, 1995: 7; Gillen and Ghosh, 2007: 67–90).

Hence, Fox argues, global ecology, creation myths, deep ecumenism and the rediscovery of creativity will give rise to a spirituality that embraces an environmental justice, which also encourages the reinvention of work, play and joy. Thomas Berry, he argues, talked about the 'inherent connection between cosmology and ecology when he stated that "ecology is the local expression of the cosmos"...[and a] society that has lost cosmology has lost a sense of ecology and its relationship to the Earth' (Fox, 2006b: 107). It has lost its holistic interconnectedness. The thread that runs through Fox's thinking is interrelated; and one thought leads to another from his concept of the Cosmic Christ and his indwelling, to the historical mystical theology of Aquinas, Eckhart and Hildegard, whose visions and environmental ethics becomes the means for healing Mother Earth's pain. However, I would argue, that the foundation for Fox's interconnected thinking is anchored in Chenu's sacramental theology of the Church in the world. Specifically, in the relationship between the doctrine of Creation and the doctrine of a continued incarnation in history especially in relation to the sanctification of work and social justice which we will examine next.

3. *Chenu and Fox: A Theology of Work*

Chenu argued that people transform history into eternity through their work. He drew, as Philibert argues, ‘from Christ’s incarnation a series of theological formulas that place our social, historical and anthropological predicament in dialogue with divine grace’ (2004: 58, 651–52). Chenu’s Christology is most obvious when he defines the relationship between Christ and history or, put another way, the relationship between the incarnation and creation. Chenu’s interest is ‘global: history as it relates to the order of creation’ and, in this sense, in Chenu’s thought the ‘Incarnation is like the terrestrial worldly connection, through the incarnate Word, of the creative work of the Word unfolding in the world’. It is the incarnation of Christ that brings the new creation to fulfillment and this will be affirmed eschatologically in the ‘fullness of time’ (Potworowski, 2001: 216). Moreover, God does not differentiate and the call to respond and co-operate with the divine loving emanation encompasses both religious vocations and worldly positions equally. Thus, in Chenu’s thought, human persons through their calling or their work become co-creators with God and history becomes the ‘progressive realization of the image of God in the world’ (Potworowski, 2001: 217–18, 95).

Fox’s doctrine of creation and a cosmic incarnation, shares certain characteristics with Chenu’s theology of a continued incarnation, especially in relation to the theology of work. Salvation, in Fox’s thought, constitutes living a harmonious holistic life in such a way that we are able to let go of death and return to our origins, in order to examine our pre-existence or uniqueness while cultivating a reverence for creation. This mental letting go of the fear death and embracing *eros*, according to Fox, represents a ‘profound salvific healing and salvation from sin’, in what he terms a ‘second creation’ (1983b: 123–24). This is the rebirth of the very quality of our humanness, in that it unites Creator and creation, while promoting a renewed growth and a return to blessing, as well as ‘joyous play’ that will encourage the salvific value of the work of ritual makers, artists, storytellers. God is not ‘incarnated as the perfect one’, in Fox’s argument. Jesus the man is a ‘divinely imperfect creator’ (1983b: 123–24) and while he was present with the Creator from the beginning, he only fully incarnated the divine Dabhar in his human life. The elder of many siblings, Jesus the ‘Cosmic Christ’ becomes a template for humankind

to follow in order that they, as ‘other Christs’ may also dialogue with divine grace in a spiral incarnation in a way that interconnects their vocation or work with the universe that, he says, drives the ‘cosmic wheel’ (1995a: 1–2; cf. 1988a: 161).

Fox’s cyclical concept, in a similar way to Chenu’s, is expansive and global. It is based on, as Cormuss comments, the modern ideas of ‘initiative, self-improvement, empowerment, and advocacy; its beliefs, values, and norms are communicated through educational and psycho-social means that are intended to foster both personal and societal transformation’ (2006: 57). Thus, personal transformation will lead to the healing and resurrection of Mother Earth and, an ecclesiogenesis, the rebirth of an earth-affirming pluralistic church. This alone, in Fox’s opinion, will make all things new and, as a consequence, reverse the prevailing social and environmental crises (1988a: 161).

Since the Church has been viewed as a ‘pilgrim people’, who are united by culture and sociological development, Chenu argues that God has chosen to be mediated ‘by and present in, to and for creation’ through the events of human history, rather than from ‘beyond or above it’; to ‘fail to recognise this is to fail to be penetrated by the mystery of Incarnation’ (Burke-Sullivan, 2003: 142–43). Nonetheless, this incarnation of necessity must be understood as fluid, in that the God who was presented to the people by the medieval church has no relevance for today’s evolving society that is culturally and socially in a continuous developmental flux because of the nature of work and society. The dominant view at the time Chenu was writing was that work itself had no value. Its only value originated in the ‘intention or attitude of the worker’ (2001: 129). Nonetheless, he was intent on developing a theology of work as an object in itself, in order to ‘discover its own nature, its material and human processes’; only then, he argued, can we make a ‘Christian judgment about its internal laws and spiritual exigencies’ (Potworowski, 2001: 129). Therefore a theology of work examined under the light of faith would be a deliberation on the human activity of work, which thereby ‘directly or indirectly enters the economy of salvation’ (2001: 129). Workers, as social beings, applying their gifts and ministry within their most fundamental ‘apostolate’, can accomplish God’s plan for the world within their experience of the social, in what Chenu

termed an ‘advent of socialization’: a new awareness of the social dimension being integrated into the work of grace (Potworowski, 2001: 130–31). As, Chenu argues,

the collective evolution of humanity is interwoven with the evolution of life, even with the evolution of the universe... Work, typical activity of the human, down to its technical and economical substratum, is a factor of true socialization and a principle of communal life. The worker, however, must be a member of this community. (Chenu in Fox, 1995a: 59; cf. Chenu, 1963: 68)³

Chenu’s interpretation of the ‘historical status of Christianity and the centrality of the incarnation’ became foundational to the theology that emerged from Vatican II (Potworowski, 2001: xi). Eventually, with the pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church itself was expressed as incarnate in time, history and society. The original incarnation and a continued incarnation were understood as the ‘means by which God acted within and on behalf of creation’ (Burke-Sullivan, 2003: 142–43).⁴ The encyclical now focused on humanity, declaring that

human activity, to be sure, takes its significance from its relationship to man. Just as it proceeds from man, so it is ordered toward man. For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. (Paul VI, 1965: 35)

Chenu, however, interpreted the passage to mean that humans, in building up the world through work, could simultaneously perfect themselves (1986: 21). He omitted to note ‘that the words above portray work’s transforming effect upon man as more important than its external impact’ (Gregg, 2001: 84.). However, Fox, while missing Chenu’s depth, has embraced his concept of the salvific nature of work and its social ramifications, in that he

³ There is no indication here as to what Chenu meant by ‘community’. However, it is probably safe to assume that he is referring to the Roman Catholic Church.

⁴ See Chapter 2, §3, ‘The Significance of Chenu’s Thought in Relation to Matthew Fox’.

recognizes work as a sacrament and the creative expression of humanity and the Spirit's work in the world through humankind (1995a: 296).

In Fox's thought, a new cosmological understanding of work as a ritual becomes an expression of our love for God. Work is sacramental, in that it bestows blessing on both giver and receiver and, viewed metaphorically, it becomes a symbol for what we cherish (1995a: 79, 296–99). Fox and Chenu both understand humans to be co-creators with God, in that the human person's body and soul are incorporated into the channel of grace, which manifests itself in work and society, while the political milieu and the mechanization and character of the work intrinsically become the arena in which theology begins to interact with society (Fox, 1995a: 123; Potworowski, 2001: 95, 136–37; 159–61). In *The Reinvention of Work* Fox begins to talk about 'the priesthood of all workers', as he seeks to reinvigorate the notion of work with a spiritual purpose. Seeking to widen the parameters of his new paradigm, he outlines how his new approach will reshape education, politics, health care, science and technology and sexuality. Humans are to reshape their lives by changing the ways in which they compensate and create work, while at the same time redefining and evaluating it in terms of outer and inner work.

Our outer work, as Chenu defined it, is the work we do in society; it is the means by which we support ourselves and our families, whether by industry or rural agriculture; it also arises from the 'inside out, work is the expression of our soul, our inner being; it is unique to the individual; it is creative' (Fox, 1995a: 5). Fox introduces the term 'inner work', which he defines as 'a work to be done on the inner man.' Our work ethic, he argues, should be holistic rather than understood as a mindless chore that consumes most of our time and energy while destroying our spirit. All the work humanity engages in is spiritual and, in some sense, prophetic, since it 'contributes to the growth of justice and compassion in the world; it contributes to social transformation. Such work is, in a very real sense, God's work. By it we become co-creators with a God who is both just and compassionate' (1995a: 13). Fox's arguments are always cyclical, in that he returns consistently to the themes of co-creation and work, which, he argues, are illuminated by

the traditional seven sacraments of the Catholic Church, especially as applied to the theology of humans and work itself:

- Baptism—a cosmological work that welcomes us into the universe celebrated in the work of ‘science, art, education rituals and the green revolution.’
- Penance or reconciliation—the grief work that brings healing from abuse, a penitential work by parents, teachers, friends, lovers, councilors, ritual leaders and ministers.
- Confirmation—this anoints us for life, the rites of passage for adolescents emerging into maturity practiced by parents, teachers, police, the entertainment industry in all its forms and priests.
- Eucharist—nourishing spiritual food that prepares us for our sacred work supplied by priests, commerce, farmers, homemakers and refuse collectors.
- Marriage—the sacrament of relationships by lovers, parents, grandparents, family, and friends in a sacred graced work whether married or celibate.
- Ordination—the sacrament of a leadership that is prophetic, justice-orientated and prepared to serve.
- Healing the sick—the sacrament of making whole by doctors, nurses, teachers, journalists, historians. (1995a: 302–305)

The list, as Fox confesses, is arbitrary. Nonetheless, he argues that it does have a rationale, in that it is based on Rupert Sheldrake’s concept of ‘morphic fields’, ‘the collective consciousness of our ancestors’, which he presents as a practical guide to our continuing work of birthing a new creation (1995a: 306). Chenu likewise understood ‘charism as the gift of the spirit for the good of the community...a twofold mission of Son and Spirit’ (Potworowski, 2001: 192) and, in his thought, our true selves are called to birth the new creation. Fox argues that this birthing of a new creation is contingent on the continuous cyclical reincarnation of the Cosmic Christ, the means by which, he argues, human creativity interacts with the God who is responsible for the survival of Mother Earth (Fox, 1988a: 64, 201). Chenu was preoccupied with the concept of a continued incarnation, the paradigm for the divine presence in the world consequently. It is doubtful whether he would consider his reasoning to be interchangeable with the cyclical/spiral incarnation suggested by Fox.

However, while the incarnation was central to Chenu's theology, the focus of his own work remained more theocentric than christocentric and even though his theology became more pneumatocentric towards the end of his career there is no evidence that Chenu gave any thought to a personal Christ (Burke-Sullivan, 2003: 142–43; Potworowski, 2001: 197, 203, 210–11). As we have already noted O'Meara (2002: n.p.) argues that for Chenu, salvation takes place in history, in that there is an element in Chenu that understands the mystery of becoming human in the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the paradigm for Divine presence in the world. It is the incarnation that enables us to grasp the full reality of the historicity of God's activities and 'humanization is the path of divinization' (Potworowski, 2001: 83).⁵ However, as Potworowski points out Chenu 'fails to clarify the precise relationships between the unique event of the incarnation in the person of Christ and the actualization of this event in the history of the Church' (2001: 229). Thus, I would argue that Fox was aware of this omission and it seems feasible to propose that he introduced the Cosmic Christ hypothesis as a 'cosmic incarnation' that fulfils what Chenu understood as a 'continued incarnation' even though he did not articulate it fully. The point is that, while Fox is indebted to this trajectory in Chenu's thought, there are differences. For example, for Fox, the word 'creation' has become interchangeable with the title 'God' (Bauckham, 1996: 124).⁶ Therefore, judged from a more christologically orthodox position, it might be thought to be confused and inadequate, in that, he categorically declares that the concept of a 'private salvation is utterly obsolete' (1983a: 120).⁷ Consequently, he interprets the theology of the cross as merely a matter of letting go, because Jesus is simply one of many sons of God (Fox, 1983b: 71).

While Chenu was not orthodox by Roman Catholic standards of orthodoxy, and while he did not develop a systematic Christology, he argues that the concreteness and the contingency of the principle work, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, are not reducible to any Cosmic order of essences. Jesus Christ was divine and the Son of God therefore, it is doubtful that he would agree with Fox's conclusion that Jesus was merely a man

⁵ Chapter 2, §3, (d) Chenu and Fox's Christology.

⁶ See Chapter 3, Conclusion.

⁷ Chapter 2, §3, (d) Chenu and Fox's Christology.

empowered with the *Dabhar* of God. However, this disparity does not affect the continuity in their understanding of the doctrine of work. Both Chenu and Fox understand work as salvific and participating in divine grace. Work looks back to the incarnation and is historically interconnected with ecclesiology and the Church's outreach in social justice and ecotheology, which Fox argues, are interconnected (1995a: 143).

4. The Church and Social Justice

In Fox's and Chenu's thought, a global outreach ministry is a critical component for fulfilling the Church's and creation spirituality's mission. Chenu, however, based his argument on Irenaeus' *Adversus haeresis*, in order to support his view of 'Christianity as economy and the recapitulating role of Christ' in a new theology of creation (Potworowski, 2001: 216). The themes of liberation and social justice was fundamental to Chenu's thought, as both an objective law and a collective virtue, while being integral to a church that has a visible and invisible element. At the same time, the process of incarnation, coupled with human consciousness, served as an indicator of the degree of humanization within society (Chenu, 2002: 112; Potworowski, 2001: xv, 230, 115). Chenu's thinking is fluid but the theme of incarnation and the fight for peace, justice and liberation remains constant. It is a unifying hermeneutical principle that is applied to specific issues such as the role of the Church in relation to the hopes of the oppressed and the poor. Incarnation is liberation from evil while the social dimension of humanization implies neighbourliness (Potworowski, 2001: xv, 87, 188).

Fox, however, at this point, departs from Chenu's hypothesis, because he has rejected the Church as a vehicle for humanitarian social action and, in his notorious letter to Ratzinger, he openly castigated the Church's record concerning the suffering and 'survival of Mother Earth...the oppression of women, minorities...native peoples, and all of God's creatures' (1988b: n.p.). Creation spirituality, he argued, is a liberation theology for First World peoples because it springs from the experience of downtrodden women and all persecuted native people. It 'liberates peoples and structures from consumerism and materialism, dualism and patriarchy, colonialism, anthropocentrism and arrogance, boredom, homophobia, adultism and the trivializing of our lives' (1988b: n.p.).

Subsequently, he indicted Opus Dei and the Vatican ‘mafia’ of a misogynistic and homophobic ideology, while describing the organization as the most ‘corrupt and ideologically driven papacy since the Borgias’ (2002e: n.p.). Indeed, he argues, the Roman Church has nothing to offer those with a social conscience who are concerned with universal justice. ‘The ship of Peter is rotten to the core. New versions of church await us’ (2002e: n.p.).

Such sentiments continue to confirm Fox’s hostility towards the Catholic Church. However, while Fox fulminates at the lack of social justice within the Church, he is merely following in the footsteps of his mentor. In 1979, turning his attention to justice Chenu had also argued the following:

Catholic social teaching was a nineteenth-century ‘ideological relic’. In his [Chenu’s] view, it reflected ‘the ideology of the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century’ and therefore could not be described as a doctrine. Leo XIII’s defense of private property was, according to Chenu, just what the Catholic middle classes wanted to hear in 1891. But, Chenu argued, ‘faith is not an ideology—it should not be an unconscious way of legitimizing personal prejudices’. (Chenu in Gregg, 2003: 27)

Fox argues that reading ‘Marx may assist believers to open their eyes as Eckhart assisted Marx to open his’ (1981a: 560). Indeed, he argues a spiritual-political theology which builds on Eckhart’s example continues to be victimized in our own time. ‘But at least they receive the support of those who went before...“all those outside the sphere of management are pathfinders, trailblazers, and—above all—tragic figures”’ (1981a: 560).⁸ Meanwhile, he insists that

Pope Benedict XVI has decried the ‘long painful night of violence and oppression’ that was the communist rule in Germany, and, in the same week, commemorated the suppression of Marxist-inspired Liberation Theology pushed by many Catholic churchmen in Latin America in

⁸ Fox consistently identifies himself with those persecuted by the Catholic Church.

recent decades. [The] ‘visible consequences’ of the ‘deceitful principles’ of Liberation Theology in the Church in Brazil have been ‘rebellion, division, dissent, offense, anarchy [that] are still being felt, creating amidst your diocesan communities great pain and a grave loss of living strength’. (White, 2009)

Interconnectedness is the key that enables creativity to become compassionate in the service of justice towards humanity and the environment and in *A Spirituality Named Compassion*, Fox endeavoured to write a workable manifesto that would unite spirituality (soul-centred meditation) and compassion (an outer-directed caring for society). Religion, he argues, is utterly empty and worthless without the element of compassion, which he defines as an empathy that enters the pain of others. In support of his thesis he draws on the Jewish tradition and specifically on the thought of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Fox turns to the Hebrew word *hesed* which, he argues, may be translated as ‘compassion’ or ‘mercy’ or ‘pity’. Judaism and the Hebrew Bible, he argues, exhort believers to do *hesed* for someone, which implies an action, a liberating of self and others. “‘To know Yahweh is to do justice’”, says the prophet Jeremiah. To know the compassionate one is to do compassion’, a concept, he argues, that is far in advance of most contemporary Christian views (1999a: 10–11).

In his search for an authentic social theology, Fox argues that, as original blessing is defined by the four paths of creation spirituality, the three paths of Liberation Theology are defined as the moment of seeing, the moment of judgement, and, finally, the moment of action. Interestingly, the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff has identified a further characteristic, that of ‘indignation’ at the very real poverty of God’s children and the evangelical poverty of those who identify and walk alongside them. Fox concurs with Boff and has since argued that all four of these concepts find parallels within the four paths of creation spirituality. Nonetheless, he widens the debate further by identifying another spiritual impoverishment in the lives of Westerners. Their consumerist and materialistic ideology, he argues, leads to apathy and passivity in the face of another’s trouble. This he describes as the call for a spiritual and psychological liberation theology for overdeveloped people addicted to alcohol, drugs, sports, entertainment and work. In

arguing the point, he begins to make use of Boff's work. Quoting Boff he makes the following point: "There is a causal relationship between wealth and poverty... [There are] mechanisms that produce the wealth of some and the poverty of others." The issue is not to fight the persons who are rich, "but the socioeconomic mechanisms that make the rich wealthy at the expense of the poor" (1991a: 73–78).

Clearly, Fox is very keen to highlight and develop creation spirituality's liberation credentials (1999a: 109). Within the biblical tradition, Fox argues, all liberation is a 'creative act of Yahweh' and is rooted in the 'ninth century B.C., with the very first author of the Bible, the Yahwist or J source' (1983b: 11; cf. 1992a: 14). It is further embedded in the Psalms, the wisdom books of the Bible and in the work of the prophets, a tradition 'that was endorsed by Jesus' (1983b: 11; cf. 1992a: 14). Subsequently, this liberating social justice was developed by Paul and the Greek Fathers, including Irenaeus, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus and the Celtic mystics. Fox's recording of his historical family tree of social activists, continues by way of the medieval mystics Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart and Julian of Norwich, and the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas and Francis of Assisi. As to modern exponents, he mentions Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, as well as a number of modern day artists, scientists, feminists, New Age mystics and social prophets (see 1981a: 15–22; 1983b: 307–15; 1991a: 15).⁹

Holistically, the prophets utilized unsophisticated images to deliver their message, in that, anthropomorphically, God is a farmer (Isa. 5:1–2, 7), mother-like and compassionate (Hos. 11:1, 8), while Israel is God's consort (Song 2:16, 19–20). Thus, as Fox argues, this God 'was no cold, distant ruler, no authority figure in the sky; rather this God was sensitive and compassionate' (Fox, 1981a: 190). Deeply rooted in the soil and the peoples' daily experiences, the prophets speak of a God of justice rather than the concept of justice in a political message that is relevant to today's world (Fox, 1981a: 195). The original liberation theology, while aiming to draw the poor and disadvantaged into the circle of God's love, sought the power to act for change, to redesign the very fabric of

⁹ Rather like a biblical genealogy, Fox includes a lineage of creation spirituality prophets in Appendix A of *Original Blessing* (1983b: 307).

society. Fox's interpretation of liberation theology, while embracing these thoughts, focuses on today's problems of eco-justice, social-justice and gender issues. All justice and political movements in Fox's thought are mirrored in the expanding cosmos while nature is the environment in which humans realize their power for transformation. Liberation movements, he argues, are a 'fuller development of the cosmos's sense of harmony, balance, justice and celebration' (1983b: 18). Therefore, true spiritual liberation demands rituals which celebrate the cosmos and healing. The primary purpose of ritual is to lead each individual into a direct experience of the divine, which in turn culminates in personal transformation and liberation through a joyful worship and the creativity of work as art in education, everyday life, relationships and politics.

5. The Sacred and Salvific Joy of Work

Ecstasy, symbolism and the struggle for social justice, Fox argues, should be homogeneous in that 'we shall become ecstatic together or extinct together' (1981a: 41). Indeed, if we 'repress a justice-oriented prophecy' and joy, its very opposite will prevail; our destiny or 'parousia is justice on earth' and out of that 'love will be born a burning, chilling, God-like spiritual service; a dedication to making it happen' (1981a: 41, 223, 230). For Chenu, this understanding of grace as social, as well as personal, was crucial for apprehending 'God and God's relationship to humanity' and the subsequent spiritual/social life of Christians. Meanwhile, the Spirit's empowering gift of discernment through the vocations of the prophets directs the 'Church toward the eschatological victory of the Cross and Resurrection' (Burke-Sullivan, 2003: 142–43). Fox also maintains that all spiritual work is prophetic work, which contributes to the growth of justice and compassion in the world, in the sense that the prophet, by definition, calls the people to the remembrance of the mercy and justice of God in a way that contributes to the social transformation of civilization not for its own sake, but for the sake of increasing justice (1995a: 13–14). To respond to the call of the prophets, he argues, is to remember that our

work is a sacrament in the literal sense of that word; our work is a
sacrament; our vocation is a sacrament; the changing of our vocation

under the influence of the Holy Spirit is a sacrament. It is a mystery, a silent mystery that calls us from some deep and uncontrollable place to take risks, to let go, perhaps to *change* lifestyles. (Fox, 1995a: 105)

As we saw above, Fox differentiates between two kinds of work, the inner and the outer, and while the inner work refers to our souls our outer work is what we ‘give birth to or interact with’ (Fox, 1995a: 1). Aquinas, Fox argues, when he wrote ‘to live well is to work well’, highlighted humankind’s deep psychological need to work, in that, human work has a transcendent value that cannot be separated from life as a whole (Fox, 1995a: 1). The values attributed to and derived from work have been attributed to ‘the Protestant work ethic’, which was, arguably, an influential force for economic change (see Weber, 1959). However, for Fox, the view of work as a vocation or calling crosses all religious boundaries. There are times in life when we are ‘face-to face’ with our vocation, our calling to heal society, to participate in the work of the universe. However, during the Newtonian age that we are emerging from, work ceased to be relational, nature and grace became separated, and humankind forgot that work, grace and nature are interconnected (1995a: 102). Hence, according to Fox, work itself needs reinventing, in that, we need a new era and a new holistic outlook, which promotes reflection, contemplation and the self-discipline that is needed in our inner lives. Only then will the Church and laity find the answers for the social issues, which destroy our communities and perplex wider society (Fox, 1995a: 4). Our inner and outer work merge on the four paths of creation spirituality beginning with the *Via Positiva* and ending with the *Via Creativia* through which we are eventually led to our ‘Great Work-creativity’. These are the elements that will connect our inner and outer work (1995a: 4, 113–15). While this new perspective will impact on all human work, Fox argues that it will specifically change our understanding of agriculture and our connection with the environment and ecological thinking. Life and our livelihood are about spirit and the world needs an agricultural revolution undergirded by the connection of ‘earth work and spirit work’ (1995a: 140–42). The world needs a paradigm shift away from our failing industry, healthcare, politics, education and religion, in fact, from everything that is foundational to our present society.

The needs of the poor are human needs, universal needs, and bodily needs: food, clothing, shelter, health care, education, humanizing work. Until the global village restructures its economics and politics around these needs—which also means letting go of luxury living, consumer compulsion whether personal or social, and greed—there will be neither peace nor justice. The process of that happening constitutes a social / spiritual transformation of the fullest and most ecstatic order. (Fox, 1981a: 4)

Fox delights in stark polarities. He contrasts the joy of creation spirituality with the demise and disintegration of society. While the Church has slept during this demise, Fox argues that the current fabric of society, academia, business, health organizations, the economy and the law give evidence for a fast approaching collapse. The daily life of ordinary people has been depleted and the joy to be had in and through their work, which honours the earth, is diminishing. Work itself must become a sacrament—an expression of the Spirit at work among the *anawim* and demonstrated in our care and concern for the wider community. ‘We are graced by the universe. Its work is sacramental; a revelation of divine grace, therefore our work...is also as sacrament’ (1995a: 17, 69–74).

Ask your work, ‘Why are you working?’ Ask your role, ‘What role are we playing in the world?’ Notice, let us not ask *ourselves* that question but *our work* and *our* role. Let work speak. Let work take responsibility for itself. Let work stand up and be counted. Give work its dignity of being, its nobility in being among us, for it is everywhere even when we may feel out of work or overworked. (Fox, 1995a: 80)

With his writing of *The Reinvention of Work*, there begins to appear an implied fatalistic undertone that suggest a certain seriousness in Fox’s assessment of the current spiritual malaise. This is particularly pertinent for Western societies, which, Fox argues, are most in danger. Given this observation, he feels an urgency to address the issue (1995a: 17, 69–74). In *A Spirituality Named Compassion*, he provides a road map that pledges personal, social and global healing while correcting the current privatized and sentimental

understanding of compassion. As his argument develops, compassion becomes intertwined with justice, the development of the world, the new physics, the new economics and the new politics (1999a: 140ff., 176ff., 221ff.). A sensual spirituality, Fox argues, is about enjoying and sharing the joys of the earth and creation. ‘It is not—it cannot be—about owning or accumulating power, immortality, control or rewards. It is sharing the pleasures of the earth by way of justice’, but it is also a political spirituality (1981a: 223) and, as Mahatma Gandhi argued, ‘those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means’ (1983: 370–71).

The theological and political upheaval of the Reformation, Fox argues, was the first step on a long road that would eventually lead from a hostile religion to creation spirituality and an invigorating transfiguration. However, the Fall-redemption tradition has so dominated theological scholarship, that even the ‘questions that are asked’ and the answers given have been ‘dictated by this one stream of Christian tradition’ (1983b: 27). Yet it was Luther who declared that there were three articles of faith: Creation, Redemption and Sanctification. Hence, if we ‘skip over creation—which Protestant and Catholic theology has been doing for four centuries—then is not redemption distorted?’ (1983b: 27). The current papacy

can run the Vatican Museum and St. Peter’s Basilica, but we can let go of religion and begin to get serious about spiritual practice. Protestantism can shed its apathy and ask not ‘What did Luther or Calvin say five hundred years ago?’ but rather ‘What would Luther and Calvin say and do in today’s global ecological and ecclesial crisis?’ We can draw on rather than neglect the riches of the Roman Church’s mystics and prophets of past and present... (2006a: 17)

The Cosmic Christ promotes interconnectedness and wisdom that, coupled with an energizing ritual within the parameters of work, becomes a participatory art that is justice orientated, inclusive, celebrative, joyous and holistic (1995a: 136, 214, 256). Despite Fox’s comprehensive adaptation, there is nevertheless, in this area, a discernible connection between Chenu’s and Fox’s thinking. As Chenu remarked with regard to the

sacramental nature of the universe, ‘The whole penetrates each of its parts; it is one universe; God conceived it as a unique living being.... Because it is a single whole, the harmony of this universe is striking’ (Chenu, 1968: 5). Commenting on this approach, Fox asks, ‘Is this not what the ecological consciousness is about today? About seeing the world as it is, as interdependent and interconnected? It is an issue of the intrinsic holiness of matter and harmony itself’ (Fox, 1985a: 15). It is to this area of his thought that we turn next.

6. Ecological Death of Earth, Air, Fire and Water

To a large extent, Fox adopts the *Gaia* hypothesis in viewing the world as an unified being, a ‘collective organism, permeated by an unitary life’ (1999a: 149). As such, ecologically, it requires a holistic approach that encompasses physical, emotional, mental and spiritual healing. The healing of the universe begins with the return to a creation story that has been forgotten and lost in time, that of the Cosmic Christ archetype. God, Fox argues, is experienced in darkness and chaos, which is part of our universe. The elements of earth, air, fire, and water are needed for our bodies; we were born of the supernova that exploded and died five-and-a-half billion years ago. Moreover, if we examine the bigger picture, there is only one story, which has become the fundamental link in humanity’s relationship with the world of work, specifically agriculture, which is a ‘way of life and a way of wisdom’ common to all agrarian societies (1990a; cf. 1999a: 171; 2002d). While Empedocles also argued that all matter is composed of earth, air, fire and water, the fundamental elements of creation (Minar, 1971: 11, 39, 46–47; Kraus, 1989: 10–11), today the four elements are more likely to be associated with elemental magic or astrology (Tester, 1987: 59, 158–59; Wolfe, 2004: 53, 181–84; Starhawk, 2004: 70; see also Cunningham, 1991).

Inspired by Fox’s thought and writing, ‘Earth Ministry’, which attempts to engage the Christian community in environmental stewardship, produced a service leaflet entitled ‘An Environmental Stations of the Cross’ (Krum, 1994: n.p.). The intention was, metaphorically, to propel the crucifixion into our own time and merge it with the ‘entire family of God’s creation, human and non-human, animate and inanimate...the trees, the

plants, the rocks, the soil, the sea and the wind' (Krum, 1994: n.p.). In the ensuing service, prayer was made for the healing of our broken relationships, especially humankind's rift with creation and the destruction the environment, our air, water, fire and earth (Krum, 1994: n.p.). If we truly loved the sun, the water, the air and the earth, we would put their preservation ahead of consumerism and 'so-called "development", which led to the partial core meltdown at the nuclear generating plant at Three Mile Island Pennsylvania. This is the 'end of living and the beginning of survival' (1981a: 24). Again, we find this type of thinking in Chenu, who complained

that it is precisely the abstraction and distance caused by abstraction in the modern marketplace's stock market and especially in multinational corporate economics that makes the capitalist economic system intrinsically violent. When capitalism is small, it is personal, he argues; and so it is a moral form of economics. But when it is gigantic, it is abstract (asensual in my terms) and intrinsically violent. The moral menace of multinational corporations—which Chenu calls perverse 'moral monstrosities'—is precisely their abstraction. (Fox, 1981a: 24–25)

These ethical issues, which are indivisible from Fox's theory of social justice, are paramount to his ecological thought.

(a) A Deep or Shallow Ecology?

Alan Drengson classifies Fox's creation spirituality as one of the many emerging ecosophies, all of which, he argues, are based on the work of Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, which extended 'awareness and care to a larger ecological Self'. This approach he defined as a 'philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium' (1995: 283; 1997: 110–11).

The extension of self and the idea of the ecological Self overlaps in many ways with work in transpersonal psychology. Matthew Fox's *Creation Theology* [1988a]...is a transpersonal ecology in the form of a

Christian philosophy and practice that finds the Christ principle and power of love revealed in the ongoing creation of the world. (Drengson, 1997: 110–11)

While the early prophets of the American green movement, such as David Henry Thoreau, John Muir and Aldo Leopold, had been enormously influential, by the early 1970s Naess had begun to shape thinking. In particular, he articulated ideas about a grassroots movement, a deep ecology movement, an ecosophy, in contrast to what has been termed a shallow ecology movement (French, 1990: 27–28, 37; Berry, 1994: 133).¹⁰ Naess's 'Ecosophy T', as he termed it, was based on 'Self realization—for all beings' and it was influenced by the Norwegian *friluftsliv* concept (a word sometimes translated as 'open air life'), in conjunction with Gandhian nonviolence, Mahayana Buddhism and Spinozan pantheism (1997: 110–11). Deep ecology is a biocentric philosophy which seeks the resacralizing of the world. Common to deep ecological movements and to the work of Fox, and others such as Berry, is the thought that

indigenous cultures, the world's remnant and newly revitalized or invented pagan religions, and religions originating in Asia (especially Daoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism) provide superior grounds for ecological ethics, and greater ecological wisdom, than do Occidental religions. (Zimmerman, 2005: 456)

'Occidental' religions are too shallow. Indeed, he argues that, not only does the ecumenical movement need to embrace prayer rather than the lecture circuit, but that academia may find more inspiration in the 'sweat lodges and the sun dances and the solstice rituals of native people's religions' than it does in traditional scholarship (Fox, 1988a: 65). A creation-centred spirituality in conjunction with a new invigorated ecumenism and a deep ecology has the potential to solve the current dilemma facing the world, but only if humanity moves from an outdated worldview to a biocentric, holistic spiritual approach (1988a: 65).

¹⁰ This was originally published as an article, 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-range Ecology Movement: A Summary' (Naess, 1973).

(b) An Option for the Poor and Marginalized

While the focus of environmental attention has historically been on reducing the gap between rich and poor, counteracting poverty and promoting racial justice, the need to avoid a nuclear war has, in Fox's opinion, been understood to be the biggest threat to the environment and human survival. However, Berry believes that the 'bomb has already gone off', in that humans have polluted our waters, air and earth with chemicals. Fox agrees. This is the primary crisis (1983b: 12–14). However, the second crisis facing humanity is the prospect of unemployment and the resulting conflict between the 'haves and the have-nots'. Unemployment 'is an affront...an intolerable sin' and this secondary crisis has been supported by the primary ecological crisis because all governments are committed to the priority of weapons development over and above investing in education and work opportunities for the *anawim* (those who enjoy little or no material wealth). Indeed, what the world is suffering from is not unemployment but misemployment and if we would only consider artists as workers, the unemployment statistics would fall (1983b: 12–14). Jane Blewett voices similar concerns, in that she argues that the current paradigm shift is forcing humanity to focus their attention primarily on the earth while recognizing and accepting our rightful place within the earth's community. A 'preferential love' should be shown to the poor and the oppressed, but this concern cannot be divorced from the healthy biosphere, the 'endangered species, strip-mined hills, eroded croplands, polluted rivers, acidified lakes and gutted mountains' (Blewett: n.d.). An anthropocentric and biocentric approach is essential because the destiny of the people 'the earth, oceans, air, soil, plant and animals' are intertwined because the earth is our 'life-support systems (Blewett: n.d.). Likewise, Mary Ann Hinsdale comments that

etymologically, 'ecology' refers to the study of the *oikos*, or the home. As a science, it is concerned with the study of the interrelationships of organisms in their home or environment. As a philosophy, it is concerned with 'the loving pursuit and realization of the wisdom of dwelling in harmony with one's place'. (1991: 196–207)

Today, Fox argues, the ecological problem has developed further and manifested itself in other ways. Consequently, the earth is experiencing extreme climatic events that oscillate between droughts and flooding rains that have worked toward the extinction of many species of animals and plants. Meanwhile, as Berry predicted, the increase in water pollution has witnessed the rise in infectious diseases and malnutrition especially in developing countries where sanitation is primitive or non-existent (1991a: 79–81). The cosmic egg has cracked and can only be repaired by a living cosmology. We will now pull together the various threads that have been discussed above in an examination of Fox’s prescription for the healing of Mother Earth.

7. Fox’s Vision for the Healing of Mother Earth

While recent generations have waged war on Mother Earth, we have seen Fox argue that humanity has witnessed a paradigm shift towards a postmodern spirituality and a renaissance in culture that will bring about the resurrection of Mother Earth (1990b: 29; cf. 1995b: 60–61; 1988a: 160–63). This new movement is a renewed paschal mystery and the death, resurrection, and second coming of Christ are replaced, in Fox’s thought, with the ‘death of Mother Earth (matricide), the resurrection of the human psyche (mysticism) and the coming of the Cosmic Christ (a living cosmology)’ (Fox, 1988a: 3). These ‘re-name the mystery of the divine cycle of death and rebirth and the sending of the Spirit in our time. Jesus becomes mother earth crucified yet raising daily from her tomb to breathe the breath of life—*ruah* on all, enabling creativity and a rebirth, which implies an ecological healing’ (Fox, 1988a: 38, 144, 163).

Mother Earth becomes interchangeable with Christ lamenting over Jerusalem (Luke 13:34–35). ‘Mother Earth is the temple, the sacred precinct in which holy creation dwells and praises God... She has sought our good as Jesus sought the good of the people of Jerusalem, only to be rejected’ (Fox, 1988a: 146). Yet, it is future generations who will reap the whirlwind from our destruction of the planet and healing will not return until we establish a holy relationship with the earth. While Fox identifies Jesus with the *anawim*,¹¹ now it is our turn to empathize. Is Mother Earth ‘hungry and thirsty a stranger and naked,

¹¹ See §3, above, ‘Chenu and Fox: A Theology of Work’.

sick and imprisoned' (Fox, 1988a: 147)? In other words, in Fox's thought, Jesus has become Mother Earth and Mother Earth has become *anawim* voiceless, neglected, oppressed and dying at the hands of patriarchy.

The birthing of the Cosmic Christ archetype, as the indwelling *Dabhar*, challenges a matricide that manifests itself as an ecological crisis by celebrating all human and earthly values while re-establishing the interconnection between humanity and creation to its origins (1988a: 148). While the Maundy Thursday meal with the disciples looked back to the Passover and the Sunday Eucharist has the resurrection and Easter in view, Fox argues that each meal we eat today is also a farewell meal to Mother Earth, the constantly sacrificed Pascal lamb whose blood is spilt for our healing and salvation (Fox, 1988a: 147). This symbolism, Fox argues, has the potential and the power to awaken humanity to the destruction and matricide in our midst, while launching a global living cosmology for the third millennium.

We have seen that, according to Fox, we have committed the sin of waste that has poisoned the world we live in and we have squandered the lives of our young people and their gifts and talents for good work, healing and joy. Creativity heals these omissions, reinvigorates a youthful outlook and replaces our complacency with interdependent compassion. The artist/worker becomes an agent of celebration and, in the face of awe and healing, a justice making spirituality retreats from all varieties of fundamentalism especially, as we move from an 'I think therefore I am philosophy to a Creation begets therefore we are philosophy' (1991a: 104). Fox argued that this removed Cartesian dualism and encouraged right brain thinking and, therefore, a mystical panentheism. This panentheistic thinking, while 'reawakening the authentic communion of saints' (1991a: 105), liberates religion from its hierarchical and restrictive structure, Protestantism from wordiness and patriarchy and Catholicism from fascism, misogyny, homophobia and fear of sexuality.

Thus, this new vision of cosmic creativity, because the *anawim* are everywhere in every age, reintroduces global justice to counteract all manifestations of oppression, whether they rise from gender and feminist issues within religion, the earth as *anawim* in the

context of environmental issues, or unemployment and economic issues (1991a: 106–107). ‘The link people are experiencing today is not only between faith and justice, bonding the human to the human in a shared journey, but in addition, bonding the human to the earth in a new sense of the holy, the Divine’ (Blewitt, n.d.). The earth is a sacred entity and perhaps, as Fox proposes, *Gaia* is the universal, primeval and archetypal mother with whom, we have a symbiotic relationship. It is to this relationship that we now turn.

8. *Interconnectedness: Gaia, the Goddess, and Mother Earth*

For Fox, nature becomes a sacred text that displays the autobiography of God. Creation is sacred space, the divine womb, which can be understood in terms of the feminist concept of the goddess and *Gaia* (1984a: 84), the Greek earth goddess to whom Aeschylus prayed ‘First in my prayer, before all other deities... Primeval Prophetess... The Greek great earth mother.’¹²

The *Gaia* hypothesis, which originated with James E. Lovelock, received its name at the suggestion of the author William Golding. Several people have attempted to define *Gaia* and the symbiotic theory. However, while it has been ridiculed by some, many scientists have found it useful, even if they reject New Age and broadly spiritual interpretations, such as those that appeal to Fox and Rupert Sheldrake. However, it is this latter interpretation that concerns us here. In *Natural Grace* Fox and Sheldrake write, ‘we both share an interest in going beyond the current limitations of institutional science and mechanistic religion... [A] new vision is needed which brings together science, spirituality, and a sense of the sacred’ (1997b: 7). Others are undecided and question whether *Gaia* is simply ‘science made myth’ (Deane-Drummond, 1992: 281; cf. 1996: 2).

As to the theory itself, Lovelock’s studies into the possibility that there might be life on Mars eventually led to him to questioning the basis for life on Earth. More a way of thinking than a scientific hypothesis, *Gaia* suggests that all living things on the planet

¹² While the use of the word *Gaia* in relation to this quotation is common (see Stone, 1990: 364; see also, Women’s Studies, 1991: 12), the actual phrase seems to have been ‘I call on Earth, primeval prophetess’ (Jones and Pennick, 1997: 17).

should be considered as part of a single living organism, which can modify the environment of the planet in order to survive. Theoretically, feedback systems regulate and control the environment, thus maintaining the *status quo* and the ecological conditions that sustain life on earth (2000: vii, 1, 10, 23, 56–58). This hypothesis has taken on a life of its own. For example, *Gaia* has become a ‘political statement’ for green politics (Russell, 1994: 118). That is to say, while *Gaia* principally claims to be an authentic scientific thesis, it has been utilized to make statements which may be ‘rhetorical, political, scientific or theological’ (Russell, 1994: 118–19). At the same time there is the tendency for *Gaia* to enter popular metaphysics in books such as those by Fox and various New Age writers (Russell, 1994: 118–19).

‘Glory be to Gaia’ was the title used, not for a late-night rave party, but for the beginning of a ‘Planetary Mass’, which Fox was involved with in the controversial Nine O’Clock Service in Sheffield, England (Catalfo, 1994: 95). Moreover, in a subsequent interview, Fox observed that ‘the Episcopal Church is open to alternative forms of worship...[e]ach one has its own theme—the return of the divine feminine, a Celtic mass honoring the Celtic or, on Mother’s Day, a Gaia mass’ (Dykama, 2001: n.p.). The maternal instinct within each of us, Fox argues, is embryonic and gives birth to our potential to be artists. As Jung argued, the ‘creative process has a feminine quality, and the creative work arises from unconscious depths—we might say, from the realm of the mothers’ (quoted in Fox, 1983b: 222). In common with creation spirituality, the feminist movement, Fox argues, has recovered the ‘nonliteral meaning of motherhood’ which ‘Adrienne Rich defined...as “developing the nurturing qualities of women and of men”’ (Jung in Fox, 1983b: 223).

Fox, because of his matrifocal spirituality, transposes the term ‘Mother Earth’ for ‘*Gaia*’, arguing that if ‘Earth is *Gaia*, then Earth is also flesh...we are eating Earth and drinking Earth daily. Is this not the work of flesh?... Earth is truly a blessing, truly good, truly a gratuitous grace, truly the matrix through which our life is possible and all Incarnations of Divinity are possible’ (1999b: 62). Thus, viewed from a biblical perspective, the *Gaia* hypothesis becomes a blessing. *Gaia*, he argues, is being crucified, despite being the only means of recovery for a troubled world. *Gaia* has become the mirror image of a

persecuted Mother Earth in Fox's thinking while humankind becomes her conscience (Fox and Sheldrake, 1997b: 6; cf, Fox, 1988a: 235–44).

A return to the motherly side of God would be a return to compassion as a way of life. Wisdom for Fox becomes a deeper kind of knowledge rather than information gathering. In fact, the incarnation, Fox declares, is incongruous, a 'shock, a mystery', in that God came as a man to 'announce divine compassion and wisdom', which are feminine qualities (1983b: 226). However, God himself needed to be born in order to become a playful child, capable of resonating with a humanity who, Fox intimates, cannot engage with male imagery. God, the baby-child, needs to grow up within 'human society and social structures', and because of this humanity has been and (in the form of the Cosmic Christ) continues to be 'responsible for the birthing and the nurturing of God' (1983b: 226). Thus, Mother Earth becomes a special word for 'God': 'a unique expression of divine wisdom, of divine maternity and caring, of divine creativity and fruitfulness' (Fox 1988a: 147). For that reason, the concept of birthing forth and labour pains becomes analogous with the creation of the universe and all creatures. Even so it is the Cosmic Christ who,

offers us a way out of patriarchy's matricidal tendencies, a way beyond our fear of death, a way beyond male envy of the female capacity for creativity, a way to open up creativity for all. Both Jesus and Mother Earth appear to be victims of the same pathology. Mother Earth is not failing humans; rather we are failing Mother Earth. (Fox, 1988a: 148)

Thus, for Fox, the ecological death of Mother Earth/*Gaia* and all created beings becomes comparable to Christ's crucifixion. Moreover, while Fox identifies the Cosmic Christ with Mother Earth in both life and death, Jesus the man was sent to proclaim the good news to Mother Earth. Having said that, it is difficult to agree with Osborn's interpretation that Fox is arguing that the crucifixion took place because the 'Jewish and Roman authorities really objected to...Jesus' teaching about the motherhood of God' (Osborn, 1994: n.p.) from *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (1988: 148), for the simple reason that, though it sounds like Fox, it is not in the text and either Osborn is using

poetic licence or the reference is incorrect.¹³ The crucifixion, matricide and ecocide become indivisible in Fox's thought, and they evolve into a celebration of the dying and the raising of the Mother as a 'sacrament of the wounded earth' a development that Osborn decries as a grotesque reinterpretation of the Eucharist (Fox, 1988a: 146–48, 214; cf. Osborn, 1994).

'[Are we our] mother's keeper?', Fox asks. 'This is the moral and spiritual question of our time' (Fox, 1988a: 33) in that the continuing rate of extinction is the biggest setback to life's 'abundance and diversity since the first flickering of life almost four billion years ago' (Fox, 1988a: 15). Thus far, in Fox's opinion, Western society has failed in its responsibility towards the planet. Instead, patriarchal agendas and cultural presuppositions, patriarchal educational and religious institutions have left us all with maternal blood on our hands. For Fox this equates to the blood of Mother Earth crucified. Matricide on a grand scale as well as ecocide, geocide, suicide and even deicide (Fox, 1988a: 17). Humankind must come to the realization that the earth is a blessing and sacred. It is the story of trees, food and animals. Importantly, it is the story of *Gaia* and the cosmic mother and the Goddess present in nature (1997b: 28, 198). For Fox, a panentheistic hermeneutic, the rise of creation spirituality and an ecofeminist theology has begun to tell this story and redress the balance (Fox, 1983b: 223).

While the Vatican, not unreasonably, accused Fox of being a fervent feminist, he has received a more positive reception from other Christian scholars. For example, the evangelical theologian John Drane has described Fox's work as innovative, attractive and exciting, agreeing with many of his criticisms about the way in which the 'devaluation of creation and creativity has led to the marginalization and oppression of significant groups of people' (1993: 7–11). Having said that, Drane also argues that because of his inadequate analysis of the fall and incarnation, Fox has more to say to the New Age movement than Christianity (1993: 7–11). Moreover, Fox is 'right in what he affirms and wrong in what he denies' (Perry in Drane, 1993: 10) because he 'tries to prove too much,

¹³ See *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, 1988a, Part IV, Section 21, 'Jesus Christ as Mother Earth Crucified and Resurrected' (144–49). This is not a direct quotation in Osborn; however, there is no mention of the Jewish or Roman authorities in Fox's text and I have failed to trace this idea in Fox's thought.

and in the process has probably ensured that he will be taken less seriously than he deserves' (Drane, 1993: 11, n. 24). Fox's sense of history is inaccurate and, ultimately, misleading.¹⁴

Rowan Williams affirms God's 'absolute freedom in creation' and humanity's createdness because of God's spoken Word, in that 'we are here, then we are real, because of God's word: our reality is not and cannot be either earned by us or eroded by others' (2000: 72). While he records no knowledge of Fox, ten years ago Williams readily acknowledged that the doctrine of creation had been the neglected 'Cinderella' question within Christian theology (Williams, 2000: 63). Indeed, the critique by feminists and, presumably, writers like Fox, Williams argues, have alerted us to the distortions to which the 'classical doctrine has fallen victim—God *as* monarch, God as imposing alien meanings, God as supremely successful manipulator of a cosmic environment' (2000: 78). At the same time, the issues of global poverty and the developing magnitude of the environmental crisis have also forced theology to address questions connected with the neglected Christian account of creation, even if they have 'aroused some—rather confused—theological interest' (Williams, 2000: 63). Santmire, also argues, that ecological theology is beginning to mature. Indeed, he identifies two schools of thought: the apologists, who defend traditional theology, and the reconstructionists, who see themselves as modern reformers. This reforming tendency, he argues, has led to a renewed interest in creation, wisdom theology and a reflection on nature, mainly in the form of a universal Christology. The focus is on the 'cosmic creational and salvific purposes of God with all things, *ta panta*, in a paradigm that emphasizes an ecological and holistic theology of God, humanity and nature (2000b: n.p.). Revisionists, arguably like Fox, Santmire argues, have found inspiration in orthodox but innovative biblical interpretation and a new direction and motivation in mystical traditions, New Age thinking, eastern religions, Taoism, indigenous beliefs and the new scientifically orientated ecotheology or ecofeminism. In fact, the 'result is the same: a conscious or unconscious rejection of the classical kerygmatic and dogmatic traditions of Christianity as the primary matrix of theological knowing' (2000b: n.p.).

¹⁴ Perry, 1992: 77.

Writing from the point of view of environmentalism, Margaret Goodall and John Reader argue that Fox's work, like his lectures, offer little of 'substance or sustenance' and he has ignominiously failed to provide a theological model that will contribute to the healing of the environment or to changing the world (Goodall and Reader in Ball, 1992: 104–105). His work, they argue, is akin to a consumer religion gleaned from various sources that fleetingly promises harmony and goodwill, while conceding that those who 'believe it does matter may be in danger of attributing a seriousness and a credibility to the work that it cannot possibly warrant' (Goodall and Reader in Ball, 1992: 104–105). Indeed, while Fox's work might be defensible in terms of a creative trajectory of liberation theology, ecologically it is 'sloppy, romantic, rubbish' that, while appealing to a certain affluent section of society, will do little to affect 'the future of the environment. Furthermore, perceiving him to be an entertainer, academic theology has not taken him seriously enough to launch its deconstruction' (Goodall and Reader, in Ball, 1992: 104–105). Such criticisms are not surprising, since it is clear from even a cursory reading of his work that he ignores current academic scholarship regarding environmentalism (see Deane-Drummond, 2008: 39). Indeed, as with other ecofeminists and ecotheologians, Fox, Mary Ann Hinsdale argues, has extended his 'critiquing of a domination based on sex to include a domination of nature' (1995: 196). All the arguments and diversities that feminist thinking articulates are applied to ecofeminist theories. Unfortunately, as with much ecofeminism, Fox neglects the concepts of 'evil and destruction—often rampant in nature' (Hinsdale, 1995: 164; see also MacCulloch):

ecofeminism stresses an Irenaean approach. Nature is not 'fallen' but in process of growth; it is becoming. The deutero-Pauline theology on which Irenaeus drew does not stress redemption as a buying back, but as a coming to fullness (*pleroma*), a 'bringing together in harmony' (*anakephalaiosis*). (Hinsdale, 1995: 163)

Moreover, within contemporary theology ecofeminist concepts are gaining most ground among theologians and theologians who are engaged in a comprehensive reassessment of the doctrines of God, creation and redemption, as well as the 'whole perspective from which one does theology' (Hinsdale, 1995: 164). These theologians, such as Fox, she

argues, are not merely intent on constructing a new theology of creation or redemption, they are actually working within a different frame of reference. Having said that, from a liberationist perspective, as we have seen, there are strengths here. Surely Fox has provided a service in asking us to question whether it is time to speak of the hermeneutical privilege of nature/the earth, much as we have learned to speak of the preferential option or hermeneutical privilege for the poor.

Ruether is more positive about Fox's work, in that she specifically references the 'New Fall story which is emerging within ecofeminism', particularly as this has been developed by Mary Daly and Fox (1994: 146–47). This tendency, we have seen, emerges within Fox's discussions about the Goddess, the Black Madonna and the Green man, and is developed in his latest book, *The Hidden Spirituality of Men* (2008a: 243). This is essentially a tale told by men that romanticizes a pre-agricultural society and an idealized male culture (2008: 48), while, conversely, feminine versions summon up a supposedly original matriarchy.¹⁵ That said, while Ruether is sympathetic, she does argue that while there may have been a primitive egalitarian society, the evidence is slim and remains hypothetical. This is certainly the case, I would argue, concerning Fox's mythical dream of a liberated world free from oppression and ecological destruction akin to *Tír na nÓg* (the land of perpetual youth), Avalon or *Shangri-La* is, nebulous and romantic as it is: unrealistic nonesence.

9. Conclusion

The Easter story, Fox argues, is about the recovery of a paradise lost, while redemption is paradise regained by means of feminine energy, wisdom energy and a creativity that will return humankind to an edenic paradise (Fox, 2002b: 119, 229). Lynn White, as we saw, sounded a wake up call, when he argued, that paradise was lost when humankind justified theologically the exploitation of the planet. Fox's response was a deep ecological reinterpretation of Christianity, which emphasized its mystical element rather than the traditional redemptive aspect, which, he argues are less ecologically sensitive. What is

¹⁵ See also Chapter 4, §4, (c) The Cosmic Christ in the Church Fathers.

required is a mystically orientated spirituality of liberation which, through work, will redeem the earth.

Nonetheless, the mutual interplay and the interconnectedness between Chenu and Fox's thought is very apparent in their theology of work. For both Chenu and Fox, where there are people there are needs to be met justice to be implemented and work to be done. The earth is calling us to examine the work we do (or do not do) and humanity requires a modern approach aligned with the cosmos that will provide the ethical spiritual force that will halt the degradation of the earth. Having said that, at this point, intellectually, they parted company, in that Chenu remained faithful to what he perceived to be a renewed Catholic Church, while Fox, we have seen, walked away for a variety of reasons. In a parody of the industrial revolution he primarily calls for an agricultural and environmental revolution that will bring about the reinvention of work, arguing that ecology and cosmology go together (1995a).

Fox's cosmological global justice embraces all sections of society. However, the only work that may be deemed spiritual, he argues, is the work done by the prophets who are to be found ministering within the different spheres of work within society. The prophet, by definition, in the words of Heschel, 'interferes and one significant place for our interference is where we work' and earn a living (1995a: 13). Nonetheless, these conditions, Fox argues, in the same way as other oppressed people, have serendipitously left women free to develop a sense of play about work,

to keep their egos disentangled from the questions of work style and work identity that go with being a man working in an all-male system to support a patriarchal ideology. Women are more willing to criticize not only the work world but its support system, its economic ideology, and its business praxis. (1995a: 29)

Women's contribution to the world of work, it seems, is the gift of compassion cultivated by the very work in which 'women have been encouraged to excel in, such as homemaking and parenting, nursing and teaching' (1995a: 29), which are closer to

nature's work. These skills and the lessons learned within these nurturing environments, Fox argues, offers skills that can transform society. However, this characterization of women as more effective than men at caring skills could be argued to perpetuate the gender stereotype. Moreover, compassion is not the prerogative of women.

Furthermore, 'when I read feminist thinkers', Fox writes, 'I find all the themes of creation-centered spirituality...all four paths of the spirituality journey are named and celebrated...there is simply no doubt in my mind or heart that what feminism is doing today is bringing back the creation tradition' (1983b: 271). Fox leaves us with the impression that he was the instigator of the creation tradition, and the concept of 'original blessing' while feminist theologians have followed his lead. This begs two questions: What is the significance of women regarding the reinvention of work and cosmological global justice? And did feminism or creation spirituality come first? Jason Rosenblatt argues that the term 'original blessing of procreation could be both particular and universal' and what was

God's first, expansive blessing of humankind becomes, over the centuries, contested territory that opposing cultures struggle to appropriate. What was originally a blessing whose recipients were neither Jewish nor of the same gender becomes in rabbinic tradition a law applying only to free Jewish males. (1994: 206)

Meanwhile, the term 'creation spirituality' has been appropriated by Fox. Nonetheless, Mabry (1995), confirms that it was Chenu who named and claimed it as an ancient tradition. However, while Potworowski refers to Chenu's focus on creation and the incarnation he does not employ the term 'creation spirituality' in reference to Chenu. However, he does refer to an article (edited by Fox) in which Chenu states 'Thomas Aquinas was a champion of creation spirituality in a period of rising suspicion about it' (1981c: 193–214; cf. 2001: 308–309). Even so, while the subject of creation has been the focus of theologians over the centuries, I have failed to connect the specific term 'creation spirituality' with Aquinas. Therefore, I would argue that this article is subjective in that it refers only to Chenu's thought, as applied to Aquinas' theology (1981c: 193–

214; cf. 2001: 308–309). Even so, the phrase is now aligned with the ecological and environmental movements and deep ecumenism and became a twentieth-century idiom.

The first wave feminists were active during the nineteenth century and this movement dealt mostly with women's suffrage. Dawn Keetley, however, dates the beginning of the American Feminist movement to around 1910 or even from Elizabeth Stanton and her abolitionist feminism as defined in 'The Solitude of Self', 1892. This was an earlier natural rights tradition that also promoted women's issues beyond just voting rights. Francis Martin argues that some women have attempted to trace the roots of Feminism back to the later Middle Ages though this would seem to be a critique of the Church rather than women's standing within society (1994: 146).

However, Ruether argues that there is no depth to Fox's work: it is superficial. Having 'mapped the territory', he leaves others to produce the detailed topography. In particular, his tendency to 'distort the Christian past' with his Fall-redemption versus creation spirituality is problematic as is his use of certain historical figures. His approach, she argues, is too 'simplistic' in that he over-emphasizes the 'similarities' among the medieval mystics and all whom he encounters with his own views (Ruether, 1994: 240–42). In fact the 'good guys and girls all come out sounding exactly like Matthew Fox', whether he is quoting Jesus Christ, Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, Sufis, Hasidic Masters, Buddhists or Native Americans. They march in unison and speak with the same voice but 'Fox lacks the basic requirement of historical scholarship, and critical distance from his own agenda' (Ruether, 1990: 168–72; see also Osborn, 1995).

The ambiguities of all these Christian thinkers, and the elements of social hierarchy and spirit-matter dualism in them, are erased. Fox tends to brush off the significant differences between these expressions of past Christian tradition and his view of creation spirituality, rather than grappling with the meaning of these differences. (Ruether, 1994: 240–42)

As we have seen, other academics such as Tugwell and Newman have also critiqued Fox's scholarship and his exaggeration with regard to Eckhart and Hildegard with devastating results. Therefore, I would also argue that Fox's claim that feminist thought springs in a specific sense from his version of 'creation spirituality' is an overstatement. The feminist movement is too diverse and the academic scholarship, while contentious at times, is honestly argued for. In fact, other than minor references to Fox, the term 'creation spirituality' as a definitive historical theme is not mentioned, while the phrase 'a feminist / creation spirituality' as a generic term is common especially in relation to goddess centred spirituality (Hook, 2000: 106). Moreover, even though the themes of ecotheology are a common denominator on/ the whole, Fox, even if he is mentioned, is dismissed as shallow and inconsequential and particular as the following tale illustrates. In *The Hidden Spirituality of Men*, Fox, while calling for the resurgence of the Green Man, relates a dream about an elephant and a tiger.

That night I dreamt that I was on a mountain in rocky terrain...[and] a grand wedding was taking place...[and] as bride and groom, were an elephant and a tiger. They were newlyweds, compassion and passion. A sacred marriage revisited!... The elephant was more or less embracing the tiger, and the tiger had its head out the window and was staring at me. The tiger was beautiful and strong, and in the dream I said, 'Look how large the tiger's head is'... I take the dream to mean, among other things, that the elephant represents the divine feminine. It is grand and powerful but also maternal and community-minded. I take the tiger to stand for the sacred masculine a tiger is a hunter, it is noble and beautiful, and also intelligent (the large head) and cunning. The animals were getting along in the back seat of the car, though the maternal, the elephant, was essentially holding or embracing the tiger the masculine. (2008a: xviii–xix)

While this tale is reminiscent of Bly there is a disquieting element in the story that, I would argue, stereotypes women as nurturers while perpetuating the stereotype of male superiority. Nonetheless, while it seems disturbing, one has to question whether this, in

Fox's thought, is an archetype of Mary embracing and worshipping the infant Jesus. As Richard Sugg argues 'while feminist critique is not a critique of nurturing' per se, it is often associated negatively with a stereotypical subordination of women as mothers, which, I would argue, at least places a question mark against Fox's claims to be a radical feminist. As Deane-Drummond argues, he is 'heavily influenced by feminism, but in a way that is arguably one-sided, so that he focuses on the maternal birthing process in a way that is still somewhat stereotypical for women' (2008: 40).

Joseph Gelfer, in his review of *The Hidden Spirituality of Men*, emphasizes that Fox takes a 'notably populist approach to the theme of men and spirituality, rather than an academic' approach. At the same time, he connects Fox with Bly's 'neo-Jungian discourse', while pointing out that the book 'intersects on a number of occasions with themes from the mythopoetic men's movement' (2008: 94–96). And Fox, in a replication of Bly's seven archetypes in *Iron John*, introduces the reader to 'ten archetypes' of authentic masculine spiritual warriors. Indeed, he bases his treatment of masculine sexuality on David Deida's 'farcical' *The Way of the Superior Man: A Spiritual Guide to Mastering the Challenges of Women, Work, and Sexual Desire*, which was written for the popular New Age market (Gelfer 2008: 94–96).¹⁶

Nonetheless, in attempting to demonstrate some intellectual rigour, Fox anchors his thought in a 'thealogy' of the goddess, by linking it to the way that the Church developed the doctrine of Mary as the life giving mother. Indeed, for Fox, Mary becomes the archetypal great mother, the mother goddess who, in the form of the Black Madonna, is recognizable as the dark goddess Kali (1997b: 40–41, 46). To a large extent, of course, Fox identifies with concepts of the mother, the earth and the feminine principle because he has rejected the Church as a patriarchal institution, which has both exploited women and, perhaps more significantly, rejected him. Having said that, perhaps this harks back to the Roman Catholic influence with its emphasis on Mary as the Mother of God and the cult of Mariology, which Ruether describes as a romantic spiritual femininity that, in 'classical Catholicism, is set against historical women as representatives of carnal

¹⁶ An American Christian evangelical ministry dedicated to uniting men to become 'godly influences' in the world.

femaleness' (1993: 104–105). Meanwhile, a secularized Protestant Mariology reflects what Ruether refers to as 'middle-class wives or good Christian women' (1993: 104–105; see also Williams' helpful analysis, 2009). This possibly explains the fact that, while he has attempted to articulate a confluence of deep ecological, feminist, and liberationist discourses, his thought unwittingly undermines the eco-feminist ideas he is seeking to develop. Having noted the above, there are significant weaknesses, not least, as Deane-Drummond has argued, the fact that his scholarship is out of date nevertheless, the overall arc of his thought, I suggest, constitutes a bold attempt to provide a genuinely profound and sophisticated ecotheology.

Conclusion

I began this thesis with a comparison of Matthew Fox and Thomas à Becket. Arguably, Becket's story, in the same manner as *Iron John*, fulfils the fourfold archetypal hero's journey: departure, trials, epiphany and return. His murder at Canterbury affected the remainder of Henry II's reign, given that he became an even bigger thorn in Henry's side following his death. In comparison, Matthew Fox, it could be argued, followed a similar path. In that, he left Wisconsin and his family to enter the Dominican novitiate training programme prior to studying in Paris with Chenu. A period of social upheaval when the Vietnam War was having a major impact on American society and the student riots in Paris effectively became a watershed in French politics. For many, it seemed like the beginning of a new world order. Fox returned to America in the 1970s to teach at the Aquinas Institute while writing his first book, in which he called for a new approach to Christian spirituality. Nevertheless, as Fox's popularity increased, so did doubts about his orthodoxy and, subsequently, he was engulfed by the furore and trials that erupted over his writing, preaching and the championing of gay rights. Eventually, his days as a Roman Catholic priest came to an end following a confrontation with Cardinal Ratzinger.

With his eventual return to the priesthood as an Episcopalian, I would argue that, because he could no longer be silenced or controlled, he became a bigger thorn in the Catholic Church's side. His frequent and articulate public polemic against the Pope and Church gained much sympathy from those both within and without the Church. With a bit of foresight Fox could have been contained, but he has become an influential enemy, a hero/martyr for other disaffected Catholics with a grievance, while at the same time, attracting a wider Christian and non-Christian following. Fox is only one among many progressive thinkers (e.g. Leonardo Boff, Edward Schillebeeckx and Hans Küng) that have been cast adrift by the Catholic Church because of an entrenched orthodoxy (Peters, 1989: 120; Harris, 2005). Despite the fact that Fox has attempted to challenge

the direction of post-Augustinian theology, the Church has similarly dismissed what are arguably valuable alternative insights, which should have been engaged with.

Chapter 1 of the thesis provides an overview of Fox's life, work, theology and motivation. In other words, the aim was to discover what makes him tick. Furthermore, while other academic critiques been comparative, seeking to analyse his work from particular theological standpoints (Keen, 1988; Meikle, 1985), this thesis has taken something akin to an auteur critical approach, which holds that an author's work to some degree reflects the author's creative voice and vision nurtured within his or her personal milieu. Hence, this chapter was foundational to the rest of the thesis, in that it provides an intellectual biography that seeks to disclose the inner nature of Fox's thought. In particular, analysis was provided of the significance of the connection between Chenu's theological understanding and historical insight, especially the doctrine of co-creation that dominated Fox's theology of work. Nonetheless, as has been discussed, in *Confessions*, Fox's autobiography, it is difficult to assess whether Fox is reading back into the situation what was not there originally. However, on reflection, it seems that the time spent at the hermitage in Dubuque, prior to Paris or even ordination, was pivotal, because it was during this period that Fox suspected that he was not called to be a priest in the Catholic Church. 'The priesthood was something I let go of early on', he wrote (1997a: 29). Nonetheless, this thesis identifies three areas that, although they departed from the usual analysis of Fox's thought, are foundational for a complete unpacking of his theories: (1) the French priest M D Chenu; (2) Fox's adoption of Hebrew and Rabbinic thought; (3) the influence of the poet Robert Bly and the mythopoetic men's movement—all of which are discussed in Chapter 2 and are, I would argue, new insights, which provide solid ground for further study.

This thesis has shown that Fox's debt to Chenu's theology is the key to understanding his thinking. It was Chenu who showed the way by identifying a 'lost spiritual tradition' that combined mysticism and prophecy, spirituality, art and social justice. Chenu also addressed what Fox classed as his single most pressing question: How can we relate spirituality and social justice? Chenu's intellectual background in the urban renewal movement and the emerging Catholic *avant-gardism* that challenged the French

Catholic Church's rigid apologetics has also played its part. He was the key thinker within the French worker priest movement that, by replacing a parish-centred apostolate, attempted to evangelize and engage theologically with the ordinary people within their working environment, a practice Fox continues to advocate. This milieu, which was so foundational to Chenu's thought, clearly shaped Fox's theology of work. Moreover, added to this are the common strands relating to their thought about Augustine, dualism, contemplation, and Christology.

Having said that, we have seen that, while Chenu was dismissive of Augustinian dualism, especially where it impacted on his own theology of contemplation and incarnation he also recognized that much of Aquinas' thought, and writing was influenced by Augustine. This is clearly acknowledged in his work. Fox, however, has allowed his rejection of Augustine to colour his theology more deeply. Although he gives the impression that Chenu and he are in agreement with regard to Augustine, this is not true. Chenu seeks to read Augustine through a Thomist lens and, in so doing, reinterprets him, while Fox rejects him outright.

As to Fox's preferences, these are relatively conspicuous. For example, his preference for the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly the wisdom literature, is obvious. Indeed, this is part of an emphasis on Judaism, which, I would argue, arises from his tendency towards what he terms 'remembrance', as found in Heschel's writing, and his reaction of nostalgic, heroic affinity to the discovery of his Jewish roots. Coupled with this, in that it fitted his theological schema, was the attraction of what may be described broadly as the understanding of sin within Judaism as 'missing the mark'. In particular, he anchors his ethics in Martin Buber's philosophy. Perhaps needless to say, this type of thinking has attracted criticism, not least from evangelical scholars such as John Drane (1993: 7–11). For example, Drane argues that the doctrine of the Fall and creation in Fox fails to engage with the New Testament and, because of his rather *naïve* rejection of dualism, his eventual thesis proves to be inadequate, while at the same time diminishing the relationship between environmental exploitation and the oppression of people (Fox's main concern). While I agree with Drane that Fox's theology is weak in these respects, such evangelical critiques do miss the point somewhat, in that Fox is not seeking to

defend a traditional theological approach to the fall and redemption. This is a very different type of theology. He has no intention of engaging with traditional evangelical thought, which he perceives to be narrow, restrictive and exclusive. He is seeking a pluralist theology, in which all truth, wherever it is found, is acknowledged as such. Indeed, one could draw many lines of continuity between his work and that of John Hick in this respect.

At the same time, Fox embraces Heschel's writing, his love of ritual, his inclusivism and his recognition of the tension between 'worldliness and the sacred yearning' (Kaplan and Dresner, 2007: 151). He also appreciates his outrage about injustice wherever it is found. In both Heschel's and Fox's thought, God's concern for justice, and mercy grows out of his compassion for humanity. Again, along with Heschel's influence, we have seen that his implicit Jewish theology has been greatly shaped by the core vision of *Tikkun* a progressive interfaith magazine based in Berkeley, California and its controversial editor the political activist Rabbi Lerner.

The third and final key to understanding Fox is, of course, his reading of *Iron John* by Robert Bly. To some extent, this takes us full circle back to his primary influence, in that *Iron John*, the character within the book, I have argued, becomes the archetype for Chenu, his theological mentor. While I was initially hesitant about locating key aspects of Fox's thought in his reading of Bly, my research over the past few years has consistently confirmed that his turn towards neo-Jungian thought, particularly his continued use of archetypes, especially in *The Hidden Spirituality of Men*, can be traced to the influence of Bly. Indeed, I suspect that there is much to be gained from a comparative study of Fox and Bly.

While the analysis of critiques of Fox's writing revealed nothing new, it was useful in indicating the distinct ways in which Fox has been read. Whether hostile (Pacwa, 1992a: 14; see also 1992b), charitable (Saliba, 1999: 126–27, 149, 167–79, 181), or welcoming (Peregrin Wildoak, 1992), there is little doubt that his work is beginning to be taken seriously. Fox is well acquainted with current trends and rather than dismissing

Christianity he argues for a revision in theology. However, his language at times suggests a more radical intention (Clark, 1989: 72).

Indeed, Pacwa argued that, to some extent, a shadow has been cast over catholic scholarship by those who fail to engage with him. Moreover, unlike Roman Catholic theology Anglicanism embraces a broad range of opinions and many different currents have affected the modern church and, Creation Spirituality is flourishing in St James's Piccadilly (Osborn, 1994: n.p.). With the decline in church membership and in the face of a creeping secularization the Anglican Church seeks renewal. However, in view of Pacwa's critique, it could be argued that those in authority and the laity who have already engaged with Fox might well be advised to approach his work in a judicious manner (1992b: 183). This is dangerous theology which has been, for the most part, ignored. The danger his thought present is increased by the fact that, while he is capable of profound scholarship, he has chosen to 'addresses the masses'. Consequently his '*via media* between theism and pantheism' (Clark, 1989: 72) is gaining ground and receiving a positive popular reception.

Again his development of a theme of global justice has become seamlessly interwoven with feminist thought and environmental concern. This has proven enormously attractive to many within the Church as have his syncretic worship services and an alternative liturgy for young adults. Having said that, many traditional churches would find a liturgical Cosmic Mass, which mixes techno, dance, live music and rap, rather overwhelming.

Liturgy gives shape to Anglican / Episcopalian worship and, like other faiths, the way it is expressed varies according to culture and circumstances. As a Episcopalian, Fox seeks to renew a liturgy whose structure, he argues, frequently demonstrates that any notion of celebration has departed from the service, having been replaced with a mechanistic, joyless, obligatory discharge of duty. While a defective theology or doctrine is not so easily detected by the laity the depressing atmosphere and tone of a dead liturgy is immediately discernable and is a serious defect, which detracts from any possible spiritual experience. While his critique focuses on traditional Protestant and Catholic

forms of worship, Fox is aware of the charismatic movement and John Wimber's Toronto Blessing through his involvement with the Nine O'clock service in Sheffield.

Fox is not alone in his critique of the Western Rite. Lossky has also argued that historically the West focused on celebrating Good Friday while the East turned towards Easter Sunday. Western spirituality became the prey of a doleful spirituality understood as a sorrowful separation from God, a dark night of the soul that was totally foreign to the Eastern Church. Thus the 'Western Church proves its fidelity to Christ in the solitude and abandonment of the night of Gethsemane, while the Eastern liturgy celebrates a certainty of union with God in the light of the Transfiguration' (1991: 226–27). Fox however, is not advocating a return to a renewed traditional celebration of the Eucharist. His call is for a mystical sacramental liturgy that promotes a childlike (not childish) response of joy, awe, wonder and praise in response to divine love that, he would argue, may well meet the needs of a spiritually hungry society, which has rejected organized religion and that, can only be for the good of the Church.

Liturgy, however, goes hand in hand with prayer, contemplation and the awe and reverence of God, we have forgotten that we walk on holy ground. Fox has moved away from the traditional mystic path understood as the threefold ways of purgation, illumination and union in order to initiate a mystical path for the 'common man'. Creation spirituality offers a holistic mysticism that celebrates sacred spaces while introducing a modern approach to the concept of prayer and contemplation. This embraces life itself as a spiritual journey and is founded on the thought of the Rhineland mystics and a synthesis of original blessing with romanticism and creation. Therein lies the conundrum: in his desire to liberate certain aspects of the Christian tradition it seems that Fox has chosen to ignore the fact that he is relying 'heavily upon the mystical tradition of his own religious order: a mysticism' which is ironically steeped in Augustine's influence (Osborn, 1993: 78).

This departure from Augustine's philosophy is the basis for most of the critique we have noted previously. If Fox assumed that his rejection of Augustine might free him theologically from the constraints of catholic scholarship, Augustine is not so easily

bypassed and his philosophy remains powerful and pervasive. Perhaps the most contentious side effect has been Fox's inadequate hermeneutology, which he has consistently failed to correct or modify. Thus, his approach could be described as simplistic, over-optimistic and idealistic in the face of many complex issues and this naïve unbalance has totally undermined his argument for global justice.

Fox ignores the fact that, too often, we find ourselves committing a sin of omission, since we frequently fail to do something which we are able to do and which we ought to do. We may have the means and the ability to make the right choices but it does not guarantee that we have the will to do so. As Strohl argues, humankind are perfectly capable of 'ignoring the needs of the world and dealing with sin takes more than the power of positive thinking' (1988: 42–47). Finally, because Fox dismisses Augustine's teaching arbitrarily while producing no in-depth critique or analysis, we are left with nothing to evaluate. Therefore, since he refuses to engage with Augustine, orthodox scholarship has refused to engage with him and, whether he wanted to interact academically or not, he has been ignored. Indeed, as Boulton argues, 'Augustine is Fox's honorable opposition, like Barth's Schleiermacher. But Fox has yet to learn from Augustine as much as Barth learned from Schleiermacher, and herein lies his eminently soluble problem' (1990: 428–32).

Fox seeks to enter the socio-ecological debate and thus far the academic response has been rather negative. This neglect is illustrated in A. T. Hennelly's book *Liberation Theologies: The Global Pursuit of Justice* (1995), which is a compendium of Latin American liberation theology's influence on feminist, African American, Hispanic, African, First World and Asian theologies of liberation. Chapter 7 is entitled, 'An Option for the poor: Liberation Theology for the First World' and is represented by the work of Jürgen Moltmann and Robert McAfee Brown. Fox developed his liberation theology for the first world peoples in *Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth* but despite the commonality his work was totally ignored. In essence, throughout his books Fox argues, that the intrinsic difference, in liberation, is between the third world's poverty of body and the first world poverty of spirit. In the face of this neglect by mainstream scholarship and specifically, Pacwa's comments (see

above), Rowan Williams's critique, recognition and support are to be welcomed: 'Despite this rather naive appeal to the obvious superiority of a biblical spirituality, it is clear that Fox is putting some very *grave* questions to the whole of the classical Christian account of creation biblical and post biblical', Williams argues (2002: 64).

While challenging the established church has a provenance historically it is also necessary, but Fox seems to have abandoned the pulpit and taken to challenging the Church and addressing his followers in lecture theatres or concert halls. Those who have met him describe Fox as charming and cultured with the charismatic ability to win over his followers nonetheless, his 'one night stand approach' is reminiscent of the travelling preachers who sowed the first seeds of fundamentalism / charismatic movement and must be subjected to the same critique. Effusive and enthusiastic Fox may believe the exuberant exhortations in a lecture hall can change the world. However, while he promotes his spiritual pathway and urges his followers upwards and onwards he is like a preacher, who says to his flock, 'practise the presence of Christ' with no instruction as to 'how'. Fox's teaching frustrates and his Omega Point is always nebulous and out of reach, the instruction manual has been lost. While the mainstream churches offer a support group in the form of an Alpha course or similar, there is no obvious discipleship programme or follow up in Fox's schema. His dream could be viewed as a rather tenuous 'pie in the sky' offer, something good promised for the future but which one is not certain of or likely to get.

Coupled with this is the critique raised by Steichen, who argues that her writing exposes the hidden face of Catholic feminism and specifically Fox's leadership style. While Fox routinely critiques traditional worship he is familiar with, and has supported the charismatic movement (1997b: 111). Moreover, I would argue that parallels may be drawn between a 'Toronto Blessing' phenomenon with its 'holy laughter' or manifestations of drunkenness in 'New Wine' celebrations and Steichen's description of a 'Cosmic Mass for the Celebration of the Body' with its accompanying bizarre ritual where the celebrants worshipped a variety of 'body parts' intoning '*te laudameus Domine*' (1991: 221). Human factors are always at work and the inherent danger of an authoritarian manipulating leadership is well documented. Fox's leadership styles,

during the above mentioned Cosmic Mass service, was described as ‘beyond parody’, in that he acted as a ‘side-show barker’ to impressionable, easily manipulated, and disproportionately female audiences (Steichen, 1991: 223).

Finally, the legendary nineteenth-century Russian violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini wrote ‘*Caprice* No. 24 in A minor’, a legendary theme that has offered a rich seam of music for subsequent composers. In a similar manner, if Fox’s primary text *Original Blessing* is compared with the *Caprice* the remainder of his books become supporting themes, which add to the original. Indeed his central premises may be catalogued as ‘original sin versus “original blessing”...ecological abuse versus primitive reverence for Mother Earth...“pseudo-mysticisms” versus the “new mystical story”...“boring” liturgy versus “playful” rituals and “homophobia” versus “sexual mysticism”’ (Steichen, 1991: 223). Nonetheless, because isolation leads to insularism, Fox needs an objective ‘Rachmaninoff’ to critique his work and expand on his ideas. Fox’s vocation continues whether, as a teacher or engaging with environmental issues, he would claim that he is not abandoning the Christian faith, only exploring it deeper. Meanwhile, he has been made welcome into the Episcopal Church and while some ecclesiastical authority may be needed and welcomed by some, one wonders whether Fox will show any more deference towards the Episcopal Church than he did to Rome. As he has admitted, he is a maverick.

From the very beginning this thesis has sought to explore Fox from a wide perspective. Nonetheless, by its very nature and academic limitation, it has clearly left much unexplored. In terms of the particular rather than the general, perhaps the most valuable future research would be an analysis of Fox’s work relative to the whole corpus of Chenu’s writing most of which are held in the Dominican Archives in Paris. Additional research on Fox’s analysis of Thomas Aquinas and his book *Sheer Joy*, in which he has produced a hermeneutical narrative study that re-evaluates Aquinas, and further research on Fox’s analysis of Eckhart may well be productive. In general, a comparative study of the traditional Christian mystical paths, or certain new religious movements and alternative spiritualities, with the Four Paths of Creation Spirituality would be illuminating. Nonetheless, while there has been much to critique there has also been

much to admire and much that deserves deeper analysis, none more so than Fox's focus on creation, the awesome mystery of the universe and our existence within it.

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